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UKZN receives \$10 million boost for Enhancing Care Initiative Unit

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Team members of the successful grant

The University of KwaZulu-Natal's Enhancing Care Initiative Unit successfully applied for the Medical Education Partnership Initiative (MEPI) grant and has been awarded \$10 million over the next five years for medical training and training in the management of HIV and TB. The official announcement was made at a recently held function at the Nelson R Mandela School of Medicine (NRMSM).

The unit, headed by Professor Umesh Laloo has been involved in the training of health care workers and the general public in HIV and TB management over many years. Last year the Province of KwaZulu-Natal recorded 122 000 cases of TB and is the epicenter of the disease in a national context. Columbia University in New York will partner with NRMSM on this grant with collaborative activities between both institutions.

Professor Laloo said, "There was huge competition for the award from other medical institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa. Our grant received an exceptionally high rating and the University is proud to be a recipient of this grant. The grant will be used to increase health care capacity development and the particular attraction is that it will support the training of the next generation of medical academics. If successfully implemented this award will produce medical academics with about 50 doctors, nurses and pharmacists in PhD programs over the 5 year life cycle of the award. This will place the University in a commanding position to attract research funding. Further it is an acknowledgement of the crisis in health in the region imposed by the collision of 2 epidemics, HIV and TB."

Professor Laloo stated further, "The novel components of the application by the NRMSM projects, which we believe made our application attractive and invited such a high rating are: the identification of students from the undergraduate medical degree course with potential to participate in a parallel program of development in public health and research. It is well known that a high proportion of medical graduates are lost to the academic sector and the country to emigration and the private sector. This will also facilitate addressing equity challenges at a very opportune moment. The development of the PhD program for young medical, pharmacy and nursing graduates with dedicated support and funding. The use of the electronic platform for decentralised teaching and support of health care workers, particularly in rural sites. The project brings together diverse academic departments in College of Health Sciences in the University of KwaZulu-Natal into a collaborative project to meet the key objectives of the MEPI grant and the grant galvanizes the expertise of the different research structures within the medical school including the Enhancing care initiative KZN, CAPRISA, K-RITH, Hasso Platner Programme and others to meet the key objectives of the MEPI grant."

Professor Tahir Pillay, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Head of the College of Health Sciences conveyed his support and congratulations to Professor Laloo and his team. He said, "The Enhancing Care Initiative (ECI) also has the largest certificate program and only South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)-approved, course-work based, diploma and masters program in clinical HIV management for doctors, graduate nurses and pharmacists designed to improve competency and clinical skills to optimize HIV and AIDS management. As of April 2010, it has graduated 216 doctors and nurses in the certificate and 207 in the diploma programs. This successful program will form the basis for the enriched undergraduate and faculty HIV/AIDS programs. "

He went on to say, "So once again the University of KwaZulu-Natal has been successful in obtaining a grant for which many educational institutions on the African continent applied. We are proud of that achievement. This is a grant that will strengthen our curriculum development and teaching delivery and caters specifically for the training of African healthcare professionals in line with our vision to be a premier university of African scholarship."

The program is designed to support PEPFAR's goals to train and retain 140,000 new health care workers and improve the capacity of partner countries to deliver primary health care. Eleven programmatic awards, largely funded by PEPFAR, will expand and enhance medical education and research training in the field of HIV/AIDS. Eight smaller non-HIV/AIDS awards, funded by the NIH Director's Common Fund, with additional support from several NIH institutes, will encourage the development of expertise in topics such as maternal and child health, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, mental health, surgery and emergency medicine. Over a five-year period, MEPI intends to provide up to \$10 million for each programmatic award, up to \$2.5 million for each linked project and up to \$1.25 million for each pilot grant.

Peppar provincial liaison, Ms Chalona Savant said, "The United States will not abandon its role and is committed to Aids relief. President Obama has set aside 5.7 billion dollars to aid in the fight against HIV aids. For this US government it is vital that excellent and efficient partners are chosen and the UKZN's ECI is a Unit worth partnering with. The excellence of work and commitment and dedication of this Unit is impacting on the globe and this continent".

MEC for Health in the Province of KZN also joined the well wishers in celebrating this achievement. He was represented by his Acting Chief Operations Officer, Dr Lindiwe Simelane at a recently held function to launch MEPI. Dr Simelane explored the benefits of the project

to the people of KZN and the continent. She echoed the sentiments of all guests by saying, "Education and health go hand in hand. We should give people the opportunity to develop their full potential. 1074 out of 100 000 people in South Africa are HIV positive. 70% of this group are co-infected with HIV and Tuberculosis. People should not be deprived of excellent health care due to poverty and social disadvantage. Therefore these partnerships are heartwarming. If we miss the poor, we miss the point. Congratulations to the MEPI team and the UKZN".



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