

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REMARKS

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the December edition of our newsletter.

As we reflect upon the past year and the significant progress we have made in our pursuit of understanding and combatting these diseases, I am filled with a sense of gratitude for the dedication and tireless efforts of each and every one of you. Your passion and commitment to this important cause have truly made a difference in the lives of countless individuals around the nation.

In this month's newsletter, we are excited to share with you the latest breakthroughs and achievements of our collaboration. From ground breaking research findings to successful implementation of preventive measures, our team has continued to broaden our understanding of infectious diseases and develop innovative strategies for prevention and treatment.

As we celebrate the holiday season, let us also take a moment to express our gratitude for the opportunity to work alongside such remarkable individuals. May this festive season bring joy, peace, and hope to you and your loved ones. I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a happy, healthy New Year.

Let us continue to push boundaries, collaborate, and strive for excellence in our collective efforts to combat infectious diseases. Together, we can make a difference.



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INTEGRATED HIV/HTN NATIONAL DISSEMINATION MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION OF CARE FOR BETTER HEALTH OUTCOMES



In a significant event held on the 23rd of November, the Golden Tulip hosted the Integrated HIV/HTN Dissemination Meeting to communicate the important research findings focused on the integration of hypertension care for people living with HIV. The meeting witnessed the participation of various health care professionals, researchers, and policymakers, keen on addressing the challenges of fragmented care and advocating for a more holistic approach.

Dr. Gerald Mutungi, the chairperson of the meeting, expressed his appreciation for the presence of the esteemed Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Health Uganda and emphasized the need for integration, stating, “We cannot keep asking for money for different diseases separately when we are essentially taking care of the same people.”



The welcome remarks by Executive Director, Professor Moses Kanya, highlighted the significance of disseminating research work pertaining to multi-disease models. He noted, “Integration is the key, not just vertically treating one disease at a time, and the Permanent Secretary has shown great interest in this model.”

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The Integrated HIV/HTN project was outlined by Dr Mucunguzi Atukunda, who explained the rationale behind the study, stating, “There is a high burden of hypertension among people living with HIV, but limited capacity to diagnose and control it. We aimed to integrate hypertension care within HIV care to increase screening, treatment, and control rates.” The study was conducted across 26 districts in South Western Uganda, involving 52 health facilities.”

Presenting the project findings, Ms Jane Kabami, the principal investigator, shed light on the improved screening rates and early detection of high blood pressure complications. She emphasized the importance of early intervention and stated, “We observed improved screening rates, indicating the impact of the intervention. Health care providers and patients recognized these improvements in screening at the health facilities.”



Ms Jane Kabami and Dr Mucunguzi Atukunda enlightening attendees with the overview and ground breaking findings of the Integrated HIV/HTN Study.

“Integration is one of the cornerstones in providing quality services, as it looks at the patient comprehensively”
 -Dr, Diana Atwine, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Health, Uganda

Dr. Diana Atwine, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Health, highlighted the need for integration and comprehensive care. She emphasized the importance of addressing diseases beyond HIV, stating, “Integration is one of the cornerstones in providing quality services, as it looks at the patient comprehensively.” Dr. Atwine acknowledges the potential of integration, urging further discussions at the Ministry of Health.



Permanent Secretary Diana Atwine from the Ministry of Health captivating the audience with her insights on integrating care





The Integrated HIV/HTN project, a collaboration between partners such as the Infectious Diseases Research Collaboration (IDRC), Ministry of Health Uganda (MOH), London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), Makerere University and the Uganda Heart Institute (UHI) and funded by EDCTP, aims to improve hypertension care for HIV patients in Western Uganda. The study revealed a significant increase in the number of patients with HIV and hypertension, indicating the success of the integrated care model.

To further strengthen patient care, studies like the Pulesa Study and SEARCH 1.0 have focused on integrating hypertension treatment in to HIV care, showcasing improved health outcomes and better management of chronic diseases.

The meeting concluded with recommendations for investing in a public health program dedicated to hypertension, integrating interventions at the prevention level, and equipping community health workers with essential tools to provide comprehensive care.

The integration of HIV and hypertension care represents an essential step towards improving overall health outcomes for patients in Uganda. The commitment of researchers, healthcare professionals, and policymakers to address the challenges of fragmented care highlights a shared vision of a more integrated and patient centred healthcare system.

As the nation moves forward, the significant strides made during this dissemination meeting pave the way for a future where comprehensive care is a reality for all in need.



Medical Mavericks: Dr Elijah Kakande and Dr John B Kiggundu unveil game-changing insights from the PULESA and SEARCH studies in the fight against hypertension



Collaborative Success: Integrated HIV/HTN Project Team Celebrates Achievements at the National Dissemination Meeting

Advancing HIV Prevention in Rural East Africa: Insights from the SEARCH SAPPHIRE Stakeholder Engagement Meeting

SEARCH SAPPHIRE, a ground-breaking study funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), held its stakeholder engagement meeting on September 26th at the Golden Tulip Hotel. The study aims to combat HIV incidence in Rural East Africa by implementing innovative prevention and treatment strategies, to reduce HIV incidence to below 0.1%.

The study plans to enrol 162,400 participants aged 15 and above in a 5-year trial. Phase A of the study involved 7 individual-level trials to evaluate the effectiveness, fidelity, and cost of prevention and treatment interventions. Phase B will assess the effects of these interventions on prevention coverage, population-level suppression, and HIV incidence. The Infectious Diseases Research Collaboration, Makerere University and KEMRI are implementing the project.

At the stakeholder meeting, representatives from prominent organisations such as The Aids Support Organisation (TASO), Joint Clinical Research Centre (JCRC), Uganda, Ministry of Health (MOH), Makerere University Joint AIDS Program (MJAP), University of California San Francisco (UCSF), and Makerere University School of Public Health gathered to discuss the progress and plans of the SEARCH SAPPHIRE study.

The meeting covered several important topics, including remarks from Principal Investigators (PIs), an overview of Phase A, an update on the CAB-LA extension status and lessons learned, results from the Hypertension Randomised Controlled Trial (RTI), hypertension modelling, Phase B design and implementation case studies, and case studies using the App.



Stakeholders Unite: Search Sapphire Meeting Paves the Way for Policy-informed Scale Up with Engaging Discussions and Collaborative Action



Unity in Progress: Members Engage at the SEARCH Sapphire Stakeholder Meeting



Dr Alex Opio, Project Coordinator for the East Africa Public Health Laboratory Networking Project under the Ministry of Health and chairman of the meeting, emphasised the importance of the meeting, stating, “We are here to listen to the project team carefully and give them feedback and guidance as stakeholders.”

Professor Moses Kanya, the Executive Director at IDRC and Principal Investigator of SEARCH, reflected on the study’s progress, saying, “We believe we contributed to the AIDS Control agenda in several ways. We would like to hear your thoughts about SEARCH 2.0 and continue to share our work with the country.”

Jane Kabami, a principal investigator, shared the results of 3 randomised trials that tested a dynamic choice prevention intervention



Leadership in Action: Dr. Alex Opio and Professor Moses Kanya inspire at the SEARCH Sapphire Stakeholder Meeting with Engaging Remarks

“Our results show that dynamic prevention intervention increases self-reported biomedical prevention coverage in 3 settings. If offered, People (women, men and youth) will take different things or options; They want to switch, and they go on and off. PEP is underutilised and can be a gateway to prevention (transition to PrEP).”



Jane Kabami shares incredible insights on the SAPPHIRE Phase A CAB-LA extension

The intervention offered PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) or PEP (Post Exposure Prophylaxis), HIV testing modality, and visit the location, along with patient-centred care. The results showed an increase in self-reported biomedical prevention coverage in three settings. Kabami emphasised the importance of offering different options and responding to client preferences to expand HIV prevention coverage.





“In 3 randomised trials, we tested a dynamic choice prevention intervention with choice of PrEP or PEP, HIV testing modality, visit location, and patient-centred care. Our results show that dynamic prevention intervention increases self-reported biomedical prevention coverage in 3 settings. If offered, People (women, men and youth) will take different things or options; They want to switch, and they go on and off. PEP is underutilised and can be a gateway to prevention (transition to PrEP). Dynamic choice models are a promising approach to expand coverage of HIV prevention options as new products emerge and - importantly - respond to client preferences. There are still gaps in coverage hence the need for additional product of CAB-LA in the extension phase.” Jane Kabami, Principal Investigator.

During the meeting, Dr Elijah Kakande presented powerful case studies using the app developed for the SEARCH study. Community Health Worker (CHW) quotes highlighted the project's positive impact, such as saving lives by identifying hypertension as the underlying cause of health issues and increasing testing rates for HIV, including using PrEP.

“The project has already saved lives, including my father-in-law, who had collapsed several times at home, and we didn't know that his problem was hypertension.” “This project is going to help reduce new cases of HIV because so many people are testing for HIV, and many are using PrEP” “The community no longer looks at me as a CHW for only children, but rather a CHW for all.”
Community Health Workers

The SEARCH SAPPHIRE stakeholder meeting provided a platform for valuable insights and discussions regarding the study's progress, future plans, and the impact it is making on the communities involved. With the collective input from stakeholders and the dedication of the project team, SEARCH-SAPPHIRE continues to pave the way for innovative strategies in HIV prevention and treatment.



Presenters expertly enlightening the audience with impactful presentations



Members giving feedback at the SEARCH Sapphire Stakeholder Meeting

IDRC Hosts its First Team Building Football Tournament

IDRC recently hosted its first Team Building Football Tournament on the 26th of August at the City High Football Pitch. The event brought together IDRC teams from different branches, including Mbarara, Tororo, and Kampala, who competed against each other for the trophy. It was an exciting and memorable day with a lively and enthusiastic crowd cheering on their respective branches.

The tournament saw intense matches and impressive displays of skill and teamwork. The Tororo team put up a great fight and came close to victory, but the Mbarara team took a stunning triumph, clinching the trophy. The tournament provided an opportunity for some healthy competition and acted as a platform for the IDRC staff to meet and interact with one another.

During the event, Catherine Tugaineyo, Director, Finance and Administration, delivered a riveting speech on behalf of Professor Moses Kanya, Executive Director. She highlighted the tournament's significance and emphasised its purpose beyond a fun and relaxing occasion. Catherine stated, "It is a testament to our commitment to each other and the greater mission of IDRC. The strength of our organisation lies not only in the systems we employ or the research we conduct, but in the collective strength, passion, and dedication of each present here."



Mbarara Team Triumphantly Raises the Football Trophy as Champions of the Thrilling Team Building Tournament



Director, Finance and Administration, Catherine Tugaineyo, sparks motivation with her remarks



Catherine further emphasised the importance of teams in an organisation, acknowledging the immense value of human resources. She stated, “Today is not just about taking a break from our routine tasks; it is about understanding and appreciating the diverse personalities, skills, and cultures that enrich our team. It is an opportunity to see our colleagues as core workers and individuals with dreams, aspirations, challenges, and stories.” Tugaineyo’s speech highlighted the significance of building human connections, fostering trust, and creating a strong foundation for all great teams.

The IDRC Team Building Football Tournament was an exciting sporting event that further strengthened the bond between colleagues and enhanced the sense of camaraderie within the organisation. It provided an avenue to recognise and appreciate the contributions of each individual, promoting a collaborative and inclusive work environment.

“Today is not just about taking a break from our routine tasks; it is about understanding and appreciating the diverse personalities, skills, and cultures that enrich our team.”

Overall, the inaugural Team Building Football Tournament was a resounding success, energising and motivating participants. As IDRC looks forward to future endeavours, this event serves as a reminder of the organisation’s dedication to fostering strong teams, achieving its mission, and making a lasting impact in the research field.



Kampala Team Engages in a Fierce Match Against Tororo in the Exciting Team Building Football Tournament



United in Spirit, Tororo Team at the Team Building Football Tournament



MERRY Christmas



UPCOMING EVENT: ICEMR ANNUAL NETWORK SHOP

9TH-11TH
JANUARY

PLACE OF THE EVENT
IGONGO CULTURAL CENTERS
AND COUNTRY

ICEMR
ANNUAL
NETWORK
WORKSHOP

Discover New Frontiers in Malaria Research

Cutting-edge presentations unveiling the latest breakthroughs and innovations in malaria research .

Join us at the highly anticipated ICEMR Annual Network Workshop from the 9th to 11th January 2024. Get ready to delve in to ground breaking advancements, engage with leading experts, and unlock the future of malaria research!

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