

MEDIA RELEASE

**28 September 2015**

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**World Rabies Day 28 September 2015**

It is a modern day tragedy that the ancient scourge of rabies – entirely preventable with today’s vaccines – continues to cause unspeakable suffering in Africa for no other reason than a lack of awareness.

World Rabies Day, which takes place annually on 28 September, raises awareness about the impact of rabies in humans and animals, how easy it is to prevent it, and how to eliminate the main sources globally.

Every year, almost 60 000 human deaths occur worldwide owing to canine rabies, which translates to one death and three hundred incidents of exposure every nine minutes. Almost all human fatalities occur in developing countries with 60 per cent occurring in Asia and 37 per cent in Africa.

Professor Louis Nel from the Department of Microbiology and Plant Pathology at the University of Pretoria (UP), leads the Global Alliance for Rabies Control (GARC) ([http://rabiesalliance.org/](http://rabiesalliance.org/%29%20)). On the African continent he, together with a small global GARC team and three UP PhD candidates (Terence Scott, Andre Coetzer and Nicolette Wright), were instrumental in the creation of a Pan-African Rabies Control Network (PARACON) ([https://paracon.rabiesalliance.org/](https://paracon.rabiesalliance.org/%20)). The team supports African countries in PARACON with valuable information and knowledge to facilitate national programmes for the control and eventual elimination of canine (dog) rabies.

GARC has been instrumental in the development of various educational materials aimed at educating communities and professionals on the risks of rabies and how to prevent being bitten by dogs. ‘We encourage all people around the world to be more aware of rabies and the effects that it has on our communities. By being aware of the disease, vaccinating your animals (especially dogs and cats) and by preventing dog bites, we will be able to control and eliminate this disease and relieve the huge burden that it places on people around the world,’ says Terence Scott.

To mark World Rabies Day, UP students led by Scott, Coetzer and Wright are visiting schools in high-risk areas to educate children about rabies, how to prevent it, and what to do if they are exposed to rabies. The team is keen to work with schools in particular, because the majority of rabies-related deaths in humans occurs in children under the age of 15 years.

Schools interested in hosting a WRD event can visit the GARC website at <https://rabiesalliance.org/world-rabies-day/> for more ideas and resources to help plan and register an event.

If you want to become more knowledgeable about rabies and to share this life-saving information with others, you are welcome to enrol and participate in GARC’s free Rabies Educator Certificate (REC) course (available at <https://education.rabiesalliance.org>). This online course targets any person interested in saving lives, and requires no previous experience or knowledge of rabies.

Ends

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