

MEDIA RELEASE

UP Prof Wanda Markotter joins Global Lancet Commission on Prevention of Viral Spillover

Professor Wanda Markotter, a leading expert in zoonotic diseases and One Health from the University of Pretoria joins the newly established Lancet Commission on Prevention of Viral Spillover, a global team of experts tasked with developing an action plan to reduce the risks of virus transmission between animals and humans - the primary cause of most pandemics.

The Commission on Prevention of Viral Spillover was recently established by Lancet and the Coalition for Preventing Pandemics at the Source (PPATS). The commission's objective is to mobilise decision-makers and implementers to take transdisciplinary action to limit viral spillovers through research, policy, law, and practice—thereby reducing the risk of future pandemics.

“I am honoured to join this Commission and to contribute to the important work of preventing viral spillovers,” said Professor Wanda Markotter. “Viral pandemics have devastating consequences for health and economics and are a reminder that our well-being is dependent on environmental and animal health. A One Health approach is essential to address this going forward.”

Historical viral pandemics, such as the 1918 influenza pandemic and COVID-19, are a stark reminder that human well-being is inextricably linked to the health of animals and the environment. Until now, little has been done to tackle the challenge of developing a global action plan to pinpoint what can be done to prevent the domino effects that lead to a regional epidemic or a pandemic.

The Commission's work

The Commission's primary goal is to shine a spotlight on this critical issue and deliver a comprehensive report on viral spillover prevention within the next two to three years. The transdisciplinary team of experts will:

- Evaluate and synthesise the evidence on the drivers of viral spillovers
 - Identify and evaluate strategies and interventions to prevent viral spillovers
 - Provide recommendations for research investigating viral spillovers
 - Examine the equity benefits of viral spillover prevention
 - Assess the co-benefits and trade-offs of viral spillover prevention
 - Identify social, economic, and political challenges and opportunities for implementing viral spillover prevention
 - Develop recommendations for viral spillover prevention that can be adopted and adapted by governments and other stakeholders
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Comprising 28 experts with diverse representation in terms of gender and geography, the Commission brings together a wide array of disciplines, including epidemiology, virology, ecology, One Health, human medicine, veterinary medicine, food systems management, anthropology, indigenous knowledge systems, law, wildlife trade, health systems, economics, and policy.

In addition, PPATS has also launched the Spillover Prevention Accelerator, which will support research and capacity-building initiatives necessary to prevent viral spillovers. The Commission will provide scientific expertise for this initiative, helping with study design and knowledge enhancement in the field of viral spillover prevention.

More information about the Commission and the recent announcement can be found here:

<https://www.preventingfuturepandemics.org/commission>

About Professor Wanda Markotter

Professor Wanda Markotter holds the Future Africa Research Chair in One Health (People, Health, and Place), as well as the position of Director at the Centre for Viral Zoonoses within the Department of Medical Virology, Faculty of Health Sciences, at the University of Pretoria. She is also the DSI-NRF Research Chair in "Infectious Diseases of Animals (Zoonoses)". Her interdisciplinary research programme focuses on bat pathogens and predicting and preventing the risk of spillover. In 2021 she was appointed as the Co-Chair of the One Health High-Level Expert Panel (OHHLEP) advising the WHO, WOAHA, FAO, and UNEP. She is involved in several One Health activities with a pan-Africa focus.

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ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on the Hatfield Campus, Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also the largest producer of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). It is the only University in the country with a Faculty of Veterinary Science, ranked top in Africa. Overall has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 55 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes.

UP is one of the top five universities in South Africa, according to the 2019-2020 rankings by the Centre for World University Rankings. It is ranked among the top 100 universities worldwide in three fields of study (veterinary science, theology, and law) and the top 1% in eight fields of study (agricultural sciences, clinical medicine, engineering, environment/ecology, immunology, microbiology, plant and animal sciences and social sciences).

In May 2020, the annual UK Financial Times Executive Education Rankings again ranked GIBS as the top South African and African business school. The University also has an extensive community engagement programme with approximately 33 000 students involved in community upliftment. Furthermore, UP is building considerable capacities and strengths for the Fourth Industrial Revolution by preparing students for the world beyond University and offering work-readiness and entrepreneurship training.

For more information, go to www.up.ac.za

About Future Africa

Future Africa is the University of Pretoria's collaborative platform for research that works across the sciences and with society to address Africa's biggest and most urgent contemporary challenges. Our fundamental purpose is to develop and unleash the transformative potential of African sciences to inform and inspire a future of thriving African societies.

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