

4 November 2021

MEDIA RELEASE

UP Institute for Sustainable Malaria Control secures Gates Foundation grant

PRETORIA – The University of Pretoria Institute for Sustainable Malaria Control (UP ISMC) has been awarded a grant by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to develop and deliver a leadership and management training course to support the malaria elimination agenda, starting in 2022.

The grant, which is valued at about R13m, will focus on course development and delivery in the Elimination 8 (E8) countries, the malaria response arm of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), over the next two years. Building capacity will ensure sustainability.

The institute partnered with leadership and management experts from UP's Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS), the Albert Luthuli Leadership Institute and Albertina Sisulu Executive Leadership Programme in Health. GIBS will partner with the UP ISMC to develop, deliver and manage the course, while the more technical and practical modules will be conducted in collaboration with stakeholders like the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, national Department of Health, Clinton Health Access Initiative, E8 and the South African Medical Research Council.

The course consists of three modules: Science of Leadership and Effective Management; Evidence-based Decision-making; and Science of Malaria and Malaria Elimination. Year one of the course will be totally virtual. "Training methods will include an online learning and blended approach, interactive leadership engagement sessions through workshops, and online coaching with experts in various fields," said Professor Tiaan de Jager, Director of the UP ISMC. "Year two will incorporate the same methods but will be slightly different by bringing in a face-to-face experience of the malaria-focused module at UP's Future Africa Institute, delivered through Enterprises@UP." On completion of the course, participants will receive a certificate of competence with credits, which some participants can put towards higher degrees and diplomas.

"Malaria remains a global public health concern," Prof De Jager added. "In 2019, more than 229 million malaria cases were reported worldwide, with the highest occurrence in the African region (94%). In 2017, the World Health Organisation declared that no significant progress had been made in reducing global malaria cases between 2015 and 2017. Novel interventions and a transdisciplinary approach that utilises the coordinated expertise of stakeholders from different backgrounds are more pertinent than ever to achieve elimination."

The course will provide quality leadership development and management training to the national malaria control programmes (NMCPs) of eight malaria-endemic SADC countries. "Malaria distribution in the SADC

region is extremely heterogeneous, with five – Angola, DRC, Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania – of the 29 highest malaria-burdened countries contributing to 51% of malaria cases globally found in the SADC region,” Prof De Jager said.

The eight countries to benefit from the course form the E8 initiative, which comprises the frontline four – Botswana, Eswatini, Namibia and South Africa – and second line – Angola, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe. This coalition works across national borders with the aim of eliminating malaria in southern Africa by 2030. The course will make use of a phased approach, with participants from the frontline four countries in addition to Mozambique in year one, and participants from all eight countries in year two.

Limited leadership and management skills in SADC NMCPs and the extreme interconnectedness of the region – shared related populations, economies, ecologies and epidemiologies – are major challenges.

“The achievement of malaria elimination in the SADC region depends on NMCPs being capacitated with a transdisciplinary, appropriately skilled team of leaders, managers, implementation scientists and facilitators capable of developing and applying effective evidence-based elimination strategies,” Prof De Jager said. “The region has not benefited from routine training offered to NMCPs in West and East Africa – we aim to address the gap with this course. By focusing the training on the SADC region, specifically the E8 countries, we are hoping to highlight both the challenges that interconnectedness poses to malaria elimination and how this can be harnessed for more effective malaria control across the region.”

At least 50% of course participants need to be female in order to build female capacity within the NMCPs; this is in line with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s focus on gender equality. “The NMCPs have limited numbers of women in senior and middle management positions,” Prof De Jager said. “We aim to recruit women within these NMCPs to receive training to enable them to transition to more senior positions where possible.” Women participants will be paired with women mentors who have achieved success in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics arena to help upskill participants in various aspects, such as achieving a work-life balance and how to succeed in male-dominated workplaces.

“We are looking forward to this exciting new chapter for the institute,” Prof De Jager added. “The leadership and management training course for impact in malaria eradication will address a lack in critical capacity in the SADC region and become another tool, in a toolbox full of innovative strategies to strengthen the fight against malaria.”

“GIBS is proud to be associated with this very important cause where a transdisciplinary team can make an impact on building capacity in leadership and management that could help the SADC region towards malaria elimination,” said Dr Morris Mtombeni, Dean of GIBS.

Media enquiries

Please email Prim Gower at Primarashni.gower@up.ac.za or call 083 229 9011

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 113-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 that has a Faculty of Veterinary Science which is ranked top in Africa, and overall has 120 academic departments, as well as 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 Center for World University Rankings. It is also ranked among the top 100 universities worldwide in three fields of study (veterinary science, theology and law), and among 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 once 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 to its students.

As one of South Africa's research-intensive universities, UP launched the Future Africa Campus in March 2019 as a hub for inter- and transdisciplinary research networks within UP and the global research community to maximise 4IR innovation and address the challenges and stresses our continent and world is facing. In addition UP also launched the Javett Art Centre in September 2019 as a driver of transdisciplinary research development between the Humanities and other faculties. In November 2020 UP launched Engineering 4.0. as a hub not only for Smart Cities and Transport, but also to link the vast resources in technology and data sciences to other faculties via Future Africa. These initiatives are stimulating new thinking at the frontier of 'science for transformation'.

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