

Tuesday, 18 August 2020

NEWS RELEASE

UP and University of Leeds collaborate on digital project to teach kids about COVID-19

The University of Pretoria (UP) and the University of Leeds are working together on a project to determine if children between eight and 12 years old can learn about COVID-19 through a storybook and/or by playing an online game.

The research is being spearheaded by Dr Nico Claassen, a senior lecturer at UP's School of Health Systems and Public Health, and is titled "Managing the COVID-19 'infodemic': Development of a booklet and mobile game to be used as teaching tools to convey OHS [occupational health and safety] message".

Children are asked to complete an online survey with simple health and safety questions about the virus before they are sent the storybook, called *Sibo Stays Healthy*. "They get the book to read for three days," explains Dr Claassen. "Some children get the book and the game – the game is sent to 50% of the participating children to determine if playing a game in combination with reading the booklet adds value in terms of knowledge. Thereafter, they complete the same questionnaire again. The results are compared to see if they have learnt anything from having read the book only, or from having read the book *and* playing the game."

According to Prof Tiaan de Jager, Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences, this is just one of many initiatives that were supported by the University of Leeds. *Sibo Stays Healthy* is an addition to *Sibo Fights Malaria* and *Sibo Goes Bananas*, which focuses on malaria prevention and the importance of a healthy lifestyle respectively.

"The questionnaires are Google-based," says Ginny Stone, author of the illustrated online book. "*Sibo Stays Healthy* is a digital reader and the game is an app that can be played on desktop or mobile devices."

Dr Claassen hopes to see children's knowledge about COVID-19 improve after they have read *Sibo Stays Healthy* and that misconceptions are addressed. He says the social behaviour of the public at large shows that there is still a lack of understanding about COVID-19, despite continuous messaging in the media about the virus and its implications. The proposed approach makes use of the following framework proposed by the World Health Organisation: identify evidence, simplify knowledge, amplify actions and quantify the impact.

The booklet and digital application will address current challenges in information management by simplifying digital verification and social media messages, and will demonstrate how to connect with the correct sources of authoritative health information. It will also address misinformation on social media in a non-threatening way and empower the public to question sources of information.

For more information about the project, go to <https://sibo.co.za/health-research-project>. Permission is required from parents/guardians before children can participate; parents/guardians are not allowed to assist children with their answers.

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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 112-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 June 2019, 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 2020 UP will launch 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