



PRESS RELEASE

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AIHA Launches Twinning Partnership Designed to Train New Mid-level Pharmacy Technician Cadre in South Africa

PEPFAR-supported partnership will build training capacity at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, expand human resources in the field of pharmacy care

May 23, 2013 — The American International Health Alliance (AIHA) is pleased to announce the formation of a new twinning partnership designed to strengthen South Africa's pre-service training capacity in the discipline of pharmacy care.

South Africa faces a marked shortage of mid-level healthcare professionals, including pharmacy workers. Currently the country produces only 1,000 new pharmacy support personnel each year — far fewer than the 2,500 estimated to be optimal by the South African Pharmacy Council (SAPC).

In response, the Government of South Africa has revised the scopes of practice for the two existing mid-level pharmacy worker categories, creating a new Pharmacy Technician Education Program comprised of two separate one-year programs. Those who complete the first year of the program will be qualified to work as Pharmacy Technical Assistants, while students finishing the second year of training will be qualified to work as Pharmacy Technicians. These new mid-level pharmacy workers will assume more responsibility than the existing Pharmacy Assistants, thus expanding the country's human resources for health in pharmacy care.

Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) in Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape, has been selected as the country's first provider of the Pharmacy Technical Assistant Program. NMMU will soon begin offering the course and estimates that its first intake will include 70 students who will begin their studies in 2013. The Pharmacy Technician Program is currently in the SAPC accreditation process and is slated to launch at NMMU in early 2014.

With support from the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in South Africa, AIHA has linked NMMU with the St. Louis College of Pharmacy (STLCOP) in St. Louis, Missouri, through its HIV/AIDS Twinning Center Program. The US partners will provide technical assistance to NMMU faculty as they proceed with implementation of the new Pharmacy Technician Education Program.

"This partnership's aim is to support NMMU in strengthening its curriculum and building capacity by mentoring the staff of the department to develop their expertise in the teaching and assessment of students whilst ensuring the quality of experiential learning provided to students," says Prof. Vic Exner, Executive Dean of Health Sciences at NMMU. According to Prof. Exner, the ultimate objective of the collaboration is to optimize healthcare outcomes, such as improved drug supply management, by increasing the number and quality of pharmacy technicians and pharmacy assistants in the Eastern Cape and farther afield.

"We are honored to assist Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in building up its capacity to educate pharmacy technicians and strengthening the education students receive there," says Ken Schafermeyer, PhD, Director of International Programs at STLCOP. "We'll be sharing the same teaching methods we use at [STLCOP], including the importance of giving students practical experience working with patients to improve their health," he explains, noting that pharmacy technicians are an excellent resource for delivering care for the more than 5 million people living with HIV in South Africa. Schafermeyer and two other STLCOP faculty members are in Port Elizabeth this week to meet their NMMU counterparts and begin their collaborative efforts to ensure the success of this important new training program.