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HRSA Awards New 5-Year Twinning Program Cooperative Agreement to AIHA

The US Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) awarded AIHA a new 5-year cooperative agreement that provides for expansion of our successful Twinning Program. Announced on March 15, this new grant will allow AIHA to continue to strengthen host country organizations in support of PEPFAR goals.

"We're thrilled to continue our decade-long collaboration with HRSA to provide improved facilitation, management, and technical support for the formation of country-driven, country-owned, and locally sustainable HIV/AIDS responses," says AIHA Executive Director James P. Smith.

AIHA's twinning model uses institution-to-institution partnerships and peer-to-peer relationships to benefit both sides, emphasizing professional exchanges and mentoring for effective knowledge sharing.

With support from PEPFAR, HRSA, and US Government agencies in target countries, AIHA has established 51 partnerships and placed 105 highly skilled health and allied professionals in long-term volunteer assignments since the Twinning Program’s inception in late 2004.

"Over the past 10 years, AIHA has built successful, mutually-supportive relationships with health-sector stakeholders in host countries, from national ministries and schools of the health professions to hospitals, clinics, and grassroots NGOs," Smith says.

"Under the leadership of Program Director Carl Henn, we'll work to strengthen these relationships and better ensure that twinning projects promote local ownership and create synergy with host country goals from day one."

Through the new award, AIHA will expand its current twinning and volunteer activities in sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean Region to support PEPFAR’s strategic vision to create an AIDS-free generation by bolstering existing projects and developing new initiatives that address gaps in HIV-related services.

This includes sharpening our focus on addressing the unmet needs of people living with HIV/AIDS, orphans and vulnerable children, and most at risk populations, as well as increasing integration of gender issues into partnership activities.

AIHA will continue to support partnerships that work to expand access to care through health systems strengthening and expanded training of human resources for health, particularly the development and integration of new mid-level cadres, such as clinical associates, pharmacy technicians, and social welfare assistants.

Other areas of focus will be supporting specialized training to incorporate HIV in emergency medicine and obstetrics and strengthening allied fields like laboratory science and biomedical technology, which play critical roles in quality HIV care.

AIHA will also engage key strategic partners, including the University of Wisconsin Global Health Institute, the National Alliance of State & Territorial AIDS Directors, and the South African Cochrane Centre, who will provide technical assistance in areas such as quality improvement; program integration into national frameworks; and evidence-based clinical practices.

"During the next five years, our goal is to create the requisite capacity to manage twinning projects locally, whether at the country or regional level," Smith explains, concluding, "This represents the ultimate outcome we hope to achieve through all our twinning partnerships — that they have attained and can sustain a level of institutional and human resource capacity that enables them to respond effectively to the health needs of the communities they serve."
The AIHA family is saddened by the loss of our dear colleague and friend, Dr. Emmanuel Masua, who passed away in December in his homeland of Tanzania.

AIHA Executive Director Jim Smith said, “Dr. Masua’s death is a great tragedy for his family, his professional colleagues, and the people of Tanzania to which he devoted his life, energy, brilliance, and talents. We all knew him as a consummate professional, a wise leader and an exceptional human being in every way.”

Dr. Masua joined AIHA’s Tanzania staff in 2008, where he served as the technical lead for our PEPFAR and CDC-supported national laboratory strengthening partnership established through the HIV/AIDS Twinning Center. As one of the few microbiology specialists in the country at that time, he possessed a wealth of experience, including working for the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare at Muhimbili National Hospital.

“Having him on board was like a breath of fresh air because, at the time, there were a lot of challenges facing laboratories in Tanzania,” said AIHA Country Director Sally Chalamila.

“Labs were a section of the hospitals that were almost forgotten ... definitely not viewed as important in terms of disease management or care until the advent of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, when patients began to rely on accurate and rapid lab tests to monitor treatment progress and identify opportunistic infections,” she explained.

Dr. Masua completed his medical degree at the University of Dar es Salaam in 1995 and interned at the Bugando Medical Centre in Mwanza. He served as a District Medical Officer in Tabora’s Nzega District from 1998-2001, and as a General Practitioner at Kitete Regional Hospital in Tabora in 2002 prior to pursuing a postdoctoral degree in microbiology and immunology at Muhimbili University.

“I remember when Dr. Masua started, how he explained why laboratories in Tanzania were a forgotten part of our hospitals. He really put things into context and gave us a clear understanding of the challenges, including the political context, which enabled us to be more thoughtful in our programmatic approaches,” Ms. Chalamila said.

“His vast knowledge and experience — not only as a medical and laboratory professional, but also as an experienced Ministry official — helped us become more grounded and enabled us to develop ambitious yet realistic strategies to meet the targets we were given.”

For the past several years, Dr. Masua had been battling kidney disease. Despite his illness, he continued to diligently lead the improvement of the quality of laboratory services in Tanzania up until his death.

Our thoughts and prayers are with Dr. Masua’s family and friends.
Strengthening Use of Evidence-based Practice in Zambia’s Military Medical Services

AIHA recently conducted a three-day workshop on evidence-based practice for 21 health professionals from the Zambian Defense Force (ZDF) Medical Services. Held March 16-19 in Lusaka, the event was facilitated by Dr. Omar Abdulwadud, AIHA’s expert consultant on evidence-based practice (EBP), and Sailas Nyareza, AIHA’s Regional Learning Resources Coordinator. It was funded through AIHA’s HIV/AIDS Twinning Center by PEPFAR and the US Department of Defense in Zambia.

This was the fourth EBP training AIHA has organized for ZDF since 2012 through AIHA’s Knowledge Management Program. Participants were drawn from various national military medical institutions throughout the country and included medical doctors, clinical officers, nurses, and Twinning Center learning Resource Center (LRC) coordinators.

With the overall goal of enhancing practitioner understanding of and capacity in applying EBP to their daily clinical practice, training sessions focused on basic principles of evidence-based medicine, how to develop and phrase a clear clinical question using the PICO (population, intervention, control, outcomes) method, and how to effectively promote EBP in the workplace.

A significant portion of the event was devoted to interactive discussions and activities designed to reinforce lessons learned and help participants gain a solid understanding of EBP, the five steps to support EBP in the workplace, how to conduct high-quality systematic reviews, and the important role a journal club can play in improving staff awareness of EBP.

They also reviewed key resources including the Cochrane Collaboration, the South African Cochrane Center, and the Cochrane Library, as well as PubMed and the Trip Database.

HIV/AIDS Twinning Center Director Carl Henn closed the workshop, urging participants to use the new knowledge and skills in EBP they learned to improve patient care and health outcomes in their clinical practices. He told them that AIHA is pleased to support efforts such as this to help build the capacity of ZDF medical staff.

Participants called for more trainings, stressing the need to expand the knowledge and practical skills throughout ZDF’s military medical service staff and develop a cadre of master trainers, who can ensure the seeds planted blossom and spread.

AIHA is grateful to the many individuals and organizations that helped make this workshop a success, including the South African Cochrane Center, the Stellenbosch University Centre for Evidence-Based Health Care, and ZDF HIV/AIDS Coordinator Col. Floyd Malasha, MD.

Clinical Associates Professionals, Educators Take Part in ANAC Regional Meeting in Malawi

A team of clinical associates professionals and educators from South Africa took part in the Africa Network for Associate Clinicians Annual Regional Meeting Nov. 18-20 in Lilongwe, Malawi.

This year’s conference brought together African clinicians and other stakeholders to enhance professional development across member countries, to continue building capacity within their community of practice, and to present a draft ANAC constitution.

Clinical Associate Edwin Leballo, Chairperson of the Professional Association of Clinical Associates in South Africa, presented a 12-month report on the profession’s progress in South Africa, which led to discussion of potential strategies for further growth and expansion.

South Africa launched the Clinical Associates program in 2008 as a way to rapidly train and deploy mid-level medical professionals thus combatting the country’s severe shortage of well-qualified healthcare professionals, particularly in rural areas.

With support from PEPFAR and CDC/South Africa, AIHA established twinning partnerships linking the three South African universities offering the Clinical Associates program with US counterparts that have a significant level of experience educating Physician Assistants. AIHA has supported the profession in other ways, including establishing a Clinical Associates Forum and supporting the creation of PACASA.

Clinical Associates take part in a skills-building session at the ANAC meeting in Malawi last November.
Addressing the Intersection HIV/AIDS and Gender-based Violence in Botswana

AIHA’s South Africa Country Director John Capati and twinning partner Nduku Kilonzo of Liverpool Voluntary Counseling and Testing (LVCT) participated in a symposium titled “Addressing the Intersection of HIV/AIDS and Gender Based Violence through a Public Health Lens: From Epidemiology to Action,” which was hosted by the Ministry of Health of Botswana on Dec. 4.

Held at the Maharaja Hotel in Gaborone, the event brought together some 40 stakeholders interested in exploring the connections between two closely intertwined epidemics: HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence (GBV).

A huge proponent of combatting GBV using a multi-pronged approach, US Ambassador to Botswana Michelle Gavin opened the event by echoing her recent call to action issued in November during the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, when she stated, “Each of us has a decision to make when we see a bruised colleague at work, when we hear violence taking place next door, or when we see inappropriate relationships between adults and children. We can pretend not to notice, or we can reach out, offer support, insist that Botswana’s laws be respected, and demand that perpetrators be held accountable.”

Stressing the need to build better bridges between clinical and community-based services that address both epidemics, Ambassador Gavin told participants that she and the US Government were “committed partners in this shared global struggle.”

Thanks to the support of PEPFAR and BOTUSA, AIHA and its partners at the Gaborone-based Tebelopele VCT and Liverpool VCT in Nairobi are assisting Botswana’s Ministry of Health in their new GBV strategies and initiatives by helping to better integrate GBV services into HIV voluntary counseling and testing programs.

Partners have developed training manuals and other resources, which have been approved by the Ministry, and are in the process of rolling out sensitization and clinical training on GBV issues for healthcare providers throughout Botswana.

Capati and Kilonzo provided an overview of these efforts during a panel discussion at today’s symposium.

Addis Ababa University Leads Clinical Pharmacy Education in Ethiopia, Graduates First Cohort

AIHA’s twinning partners at Addis Ababa University (AAU) School of Pharmacy this year graduated Ethiopia’s first cohort of 52 students educated using a new clinical pharmacy curriculum they developed jointly with their counterparts at Howard University School of Pharmacy.

Since 2007, the partners have been working to strengthen pharmacy services within Ethiopia’s healthcare system in a manner that better integrates pharmacists into patient care, particularly the provision of quality ART. This partnership is supported by PEPFAR and CDC/Ethiopia.

AAU placed 31 of its clinical pharmacy graduates at Tikur Anbessa Specialized Hospital, while the Federal Ministry of Health deployed the other 21 to clinical sites throughout the country.

The new clinical pharmacy curriculum has been adopted by other public universities in Ethiopia, which graduated an additional 374 students in 2013, bringing the total of new clinical pharmacists in the country to 426.

The AAU partners, together with the Ethiopian Pharmacy Association, dedicated significant energy toward raising awareness about the expanded role clinical pharmacists will play in the delivery of quality healthcare services.

They garnered the support of the Ministry of Health, which has now endorsed the clinical pharmacy program and agreed to hire and deploy all new clinical pharmacy graduates from Ethiopia’s seven public schools of Pharmacy.

This achievement marks a major milestone for the partnership and a validation of their successful and ongoing collaborative efforts to transform pharmacy education in Ethiopia.
South African Partner Universities Graduate
Third Cohort of Clinical Associates

AIHA twinning partners at the University of Pretoria’s Faculty of Health Sciences graduated its third cohort of Clinical Associates on Dec. 9.

The 62 students who successfully completed the three-year Bachelor of Clinical Medical Practice (BCMP) program took part in a Declaration Ceremony at the University of Pretoria prior to their deployment to health services, most in underserved rural parts of South Africa where they are needed most.

Although the University of Pretoria accepts BCMP students from all over the country, the admissions process favors those from disadvantaged rural areas in Free State, Gauteng, and Mpumalanga, where students gain practical experience at various district hospitals that serve as clinical training sites.

In November, partners at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg also graduated their third cohort of Clinical Associates, who were similarly deployed to district hospitals in areas facing a severe shortage of trained medical professionals.

South Africa’s health services have long been struggling to meet the enormous burden of caring for patients in the midst of a dire need for well-qualified healthcare workers. Students who complete their BCMP degree are registered as Clinical Associates with the Health Professions Council of South Africa.

Similar to Physician Assistants in the United States, Clinical Associates are a new mid-level cadre trained with the knowledge, skills, and attitude necessary to function effectively within South Africa’s district health system.

In addition to bolstering human resource capacity at district hospitals, Clinical Associates are also playing an important role in strengthening medical teams within the South African Military Health Service.

PEPFAR and CDC/South Africa support both of these Clinical Associates Programs through AIHA’s HIV/AIDS Twinning Center. In June 2010, AIHA launched a partnership linking the University of the Witwatersrand with Emory University. Early in 2011, AIHA partnered the University of Pretoria with Arcadia University.

Both US schools have strong Physician Assistant programs and are providing a broad range of technical assistance to help strengthen Clinical Associates education, training, and professionalism in South Africa.

Since February 2010, AIHA has also supported a Clinical Associates partnership that links Walter Sisulu University with the University of Colorado at Denver. Walter Sisulu is the first South African institution to offer the new program and has to date graduated some 100 Clinical Associates.

In addition to the twinning partnerships, AIHA has established a Clinical Associates Forum to further strengthen training programs and support the integration of this new profession into the South African healthcare system. Our direct technical assistance has focused on advocacy and outreach, association building, learning resources, preceptors, and standard national exams.

DePaul University Graduates from Partnership, AIHA to Provide Direct Support to KCCB Program

AIHA partners from DePaul University traveled to Nairobi the first week of December to conduct their final professional exchange with their twinning counterparts at the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB).

Launched in 2005, with funding from PEPFAR and CDC/Kenya, KCCB’s partnership with DePaul partnership is one of the very first established by AIHA under our HRSA-supported HIV/AIDS Twinning Center Program.

KCCB’s formal partnership with DePaul concluded in February 2014. AIHA is now providing direct support to KCCB as they work to further strengthen their organization-al capacity to sustain and expand the successful HIV prevention interventions targeting Kenyan youth they have developed and imple-

Partners from KCCB Commission for Education and Religious Education and DePaul University conducted a series of activities during the December exchange.
AIHA Conducts Knowledge Management for Health Strategy Meeting for Twinning Partners

AIHA conducted its 2013 Knowledge Management Program Strategy Meeting Oct. 21-23 at Stellenbosch University Business School in Cape Town, South Africa.

“Harnessing Information and Communication Technology to Enhance Access and Utilization of Evidence-based Healthcare Information Resources,” was the theme of the three-day event, which was designed to provide a learning and sharing forum.

The meeting was attended by 45 health and allied professionals, including AIHA staff and strategic partners from the United States and eight African countries, namely Botswana, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zambia.

Key objectives included strengthening the strategies and work plans of individual partnership Learning Resource Centers (LRCs); encouraging collaboration among LRCs; and identifying best practices in knowledge management for health and use of various technology tools and applications to enhance access to and utilization of evidence-based information resources in practice, education, and clinical decision support systems.

Sailas Nyareza, AIHA’s Regional Coordinator for Learning Resources based in Pretoria discussed current activities in Africa and some challenges in expanding access to and utilization of evidence-based knowledge resources. Chief among are intermittent internet connections, lack of space to house LRCs and libraries, and the limitations of using stationary desktop computers in clinical practice.

The use of mobile devices was identified as a solution to deal with these challenges and opening up new opportunities for access to more up-to-date resources, including medical apps at the point of care. The current Learning Resources Program is therefore being expanded into a more comprehensive Knowledge Management Program designed to better meet the needs of twinning partnership institutions throughout Africa.

Experts from the South African Cochrane Center, the Stellenbosch University Center for Evidence-Based Health Care, and The Open Medicine Project of South Africa were among the presenters at this event.

Stakeholders Push Forward with Efforts to Establish Social Work Council in Tanzania

AIHA and the Tanzanian Association of Social Workers (TASWO) hosted a key stakeholders meeting on Feb. 19, marking another crucial step toward the passing of a Social Work Act and formal establishment of a Social Work Council in the country.

Some 22 representatives from various government ministries, departments and agencies, and other organizations that provide social work services attended.

Because Tanzania has no overarching formal code of social work practice or formal body to perform regulatory functions and enforce professional standards, issues related to professional conduct have been shrouded in uncertainty. This has led to some questions about the professional knowledge and integrity of some social workers.

The Social Work Council will be tasked with clearly defining professional standards of conduct and monitoring the practice of social work in Tanzania and is viewed as the missing link between social work education, ethics, code of conduct, and professional practice in the country.

The Honorable Dunford Makala, Commissioner of Tanzania’s Department of Social Welfare, officiated the event.

He acknowledged both TASWO and AIHA’s efforts to strengthen the country’s social welfare system through advocacy, technical assistance, faculty and curriculum development, and other capacity building through our Social Work and OVC Support Initiative, which is funded by PEPFAR and USAID/Tanzania.
American Physician Assistant Mentors Clinical Associate Students in South Africa

When Cynthia Hickson and her husband moved from Pennsylvania to Pretoria, South Africa, for his job in June 2012, she was eager to learn about healthcare in South Africa, and, if possible, to find a way to contribute.

With her qualifications as an experienced Physician Assistant, Hickson was a natural fit for AIHA’s Volunteer Healthcare Corps (VHC).

Through the VHC’s South Africa Clinical Mentorship Program, Hickson has played a significant role in South Africa's healthcare sector by serving as a preceptor to Clinical Associates, mid-level medical professionals similar to US Physician Assistants.

For nine months, Hickson volunteered at Mamelodi Hospital in South Africa’s Gauteng Province. Mamelodi is one of 18 training sites for Clinical Associate students at the University of Pretoria.

There, Hickson worked with seven second-year students throughout her placement, providing bedside mentoring as they cared for patients. She also conducted lectures and facilitated group discussions with students and other medical personnel to enhance their learning experience.

With more than 20 years of experience as a Physician Assistant, Hickson brought a valuable perspective to her volunteer assignment. She was able to share her wealth of knowledge with the Clinical Associate students, focusing on best practices and effective strategies for nurturing their abilities in a way that helped transform them into more competent, confident medical professionals.

The students, as well as the hospital staff, were thankful to have her on board and recognized the incredible value she brought to the clinical training program.

Dr. John Ikombole, head of Family Medicine at Mamelodi Hospital, used to mentor both the second and third year Clinical Associates students before Hickson’s placement.

“Having a VHC mentor here has enhanced our work at Mamelodi Hospital. Her presence has alleviated some of our teaching responsibilities so we can concentrate more on clinical care,” he explains.

Hickson’s students are equally appreciative of her contributions to their training.

“Cynthia’s approach and method of teaching always challenged our thinking on clinical cases ... She wanted us to be the best part of the healthcare team,” says second-year student J Coester. “During group discussions, she always shared her own experiences and perspectives on the topics, which really helped us to understand things more clearly,” he stresses.

Hickson is quick to admit that she has learned and experienced just as much as she has been able to give.

“I have gained a much better understanding of the South African healthcare system and of the Clinical Associate Program,” she says.

“I also experienced first-hand some of challenges faced by South African medical professionals and patients alike, from poor health facilities to insufficient supplies of ARVs and other important drugs,” Hickson continues.

Stressing how the Clinical Associate Program plays a critical role in helping staff district hospitals and bridge severe human resources gaps in underserved rural parts of South Africa, Hickson explains, “Clinical Associates become an extra hand for doctors and nurses as they perform medical procedures. They also help to assess and manage important emergency medical conditions encountered in the country’s hospital wards and casualties. I think we need to do more to raise the profile of the Clinical Associate profession and advocate for more resources for its ongoing development and expansion.”

Although Hickson and her husband moved back to the United States in November 2013, she has continued to support South Africa’s Clinical Associates Program.

She helped identify the need for additional training materials for students, such as a quick reference guide that they can carry with them during ward rounds.

She is also leveraging her experiences at Mamelodi Hospital by playing a role in the University of Pretoria’s twinning partnership with Arcadia University, which is located in her home state of Pennsylvania.

“I think we need to promote cooperation between US Physician Assistants and South African Clinical Associates, so we can share our experiences and learning methodologies,” Hickson says.

“I also think the Scope of Practice for Clinical Associates needs to be reviewed to incorporate more duties, such as allowing students to evaluate patients prior to, not only after, differentiation of diagnosis,” she concludes.

US Physician Assistant Cynthia Hickson spent nine months as a volunteer Clinical Associate Preceptor at Mamelodi Hospital in South Africa’s Gauteng Province. Her placement through AIHA’s Volunteer Healthcare Corps was supported by PEPFAR and CDC/South Africa.

Hickson helped second-year Clinical Associates students develop their practical skills.

“Having Cynthia around has helped us a lot both theoretically and clinically, says Zinhle, one of the second-year Clinical Associate students Hickson mentored.

“She was like our own encyclopedia or Medscape. She has such a vast knowledge and is very good in explaining things.”
The HIV/AIDS Twinning Center mobilizes and coordinates the resources of healthcare and allied professionals in the United States and abroad to effectively build capacity to reduce HIV infection rates and provide care to those infected with, or affected by, HIV/AIDS in support of the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

Funded by PEPFAR through a cooperative agreement with the US Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, the Twinning Center is a project of the American International Health Alliance, a US-based nonprofit dedicated to helping limited-resource communities make positive, sustainable changes that improve accessibility to a broad range of high-quality healthcare services and preventive programs.

The contents of this newsletter are the responsibility of AIHA and the Twinning Center and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States government or other funding agencies.