

Celebrating a diverse NICD community
**Creating a Workplace
Where Everyone Belongs**



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Message from

THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Prof Adrian Puren

Dear colleagues

In this newsletter edition, we proudly showcase diverse stories that underscore our commitment to progress, collaboration, and excellence. From embracing gender equality to fostering community well-being globally, each article reflects the dedication and passion that drive our organisation forward and commitment to positive change.

We're excited to share the launch of the Intermediate FETP in KwaZulu-Natal Province. This milestone represents our ongoing efforts to advance public health education and practice. In the face of challenges, we're also inspired by Dr. He's journey to craft joy and lasting impressions.

Our Health and Safety Committee's unwavering dedication reinforces the values that guide us. We recognise the commendable work undertaken

by our colleagues. The NICD's contributions to the National Malaria Research Conference 2023, the preparations for the United Nations Secretary-General's Mechanism Missions, and the empowering impact of NCR on cancer surveillance all reflect our commitment to shaping a better public health future.

We recognise our public health and technology leaders and their influence as we advance our public health agenda.

Thank you for being part of this journey with us. Your engagement and support fuel the spirit of progress that resonates throughout these pages.

Enjoy the read!

MEET OUR EDITORIAL TEAM



Senior Comms Manager
Sinehlanhla Jimoh



Graphic Designer
Athenkosi Mjobo



Writer
Koketso Matjane



Writer
Laura De Almeida



Writer
Nande Harmans



Dr Natalie Mayet

Women's Month and Beyond: NICD's Firm Embrace of Gender Equality

By Laura De Almeida

As we celebrated Women's Month in August, we had the honour of hearing what our Deputy Director, Dr Natalie Mayet, had to say about the NICD's commitment to maintaining gender equality.

What is the NICD's stance on gender inclusivity, and why is that stance so important?

The NICD is dedicated to creating a workplace where everyone, regardless of gender, feels welcomed, respected, and provided equal opportunity. This is embedded within our Constitution, our legislative framework, the NHLS policies, and it is our moral and ethical responsibility to create gender parity.

How has the NICD broken down barriers previously preventing women from reaching their full potential?

The NICD fosters a workplace culture that supports women and challenges gender stereotyping. We collectively need to equip women with the necessary skills and self-assurance to overcome obstacles and become more resilient.

What makes the NICD unique in its approach to gender equity?

As a science-based public health institution, the NICD recognises and celebrates female scientists, pathologists, epidemiologists, medical technologists, and staff in transversal services. The NICD continues to do phenomenal work with women at the forefront of innovation.

What advice would you give to the women of the NICD who aspire to hold leadership positions like yourself?

Believe in yourself and know that you have the power to make the world a brighter place. Dreams are made to be followed, so do everything in your power to achieve your dream, and then share the success by helping others fulfil their dreams.

What is your message to the women of the NICD?

We can't control what happens to us, but we can control how we respond to it. We can choose how we react to adversity, and we can use this ability to gain control and shift our circumstances. In the words of Maya Angelou, "Whatever you want to do, if you want to be great at it, you have to love it and be able to make sacrifices for it".

"Whatever you want to do, if you want to be great at it, you have to love it and be able to make sacrifices for it".





Launch of the Intermediate FETP For KwaZulu-Natal Province

By Khuliso Ravhuhali

In a significant stride towards strengthening public health capacities, the South African Field Epidemiology Training Programme (SAFETP) has marked a momentous occasion with the launch of the 3rd cohort of Intermediate FETP in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, on 21 August 2023.

The Intermediate FETP is a 9-month supervised, on-the-job, competency-based training and service programme to improve field epidemiological capacity at the district and provincial levels of the health system. Contributing to the significance of the occasion was the attendance and support of Dr Rick Gelting from the United States Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (US CDC) – South Africa office.

Public health challenges are dynamic and ever-evolving, requiring a well-equipped and adaptable workforce to address them effectively. Like many regions around the world, KwaZulu-Natal faces a diverse range of health threats ranging from infectious diseases to non-communicable

diseases, environmental health concerns, and more. Responding to these challenges necessitates a cadre of professionals equipped with specialised epidemiological skills to investigate, analyse, and mitigate health risks.

Fifteen (15) enthusiastic and passionate individuals have been selected to participate in the inaugural class of the Intermediate FETP in KwaZulu-Natal province. These trainees come from diverse educational and professional backgrounds, ranging from infection prevention and control (IPC) nurses and communicable disease control coordinators (CDC) to environmental health practitioners (EHPs). Throughout the programme, these trainees will engage in a blend of classroom-based learning, hands-on field investigations, and mentorship under the guidance of experienced epidemiologists and public health specialists. This holistic approach ensures that the trainees not only understand the theoretical underpinnings of epidemiology but also gain practical experience in applying these concepts to real-world scenarios.





Crafting Lasting Impressions of Joy Amidst Challenges

Dr Zhixin He

By Nande Harmans

Meet the effervescent Dr Zhixin He, a beacon of positivity and resilience at the Division of Public Health Surveillance and Response (DPHSR) Outbreak Response Unit. As a dedicated member of the team, her responsibilities encompass identifying potential outbreaks, ensuring necessary actions are taken, and confirming their completion. Starting her day with the vibrant beats of 947 FM, she commutes with enthusiasm.

Upon reaching her office, a ritual begins – two teaspoons of coffee, two sugars, and a splash of milk compose the perfect cup that fuels her energy. Born in China, Zhixin, whose name when translated to English means Zhi-Knowledge Xin- Happiness, moved to South Africa in 1995 with her parents. Despite being born during China's one-child policy, which predominantly affected urban areas, she grew up in Johannesburg as an only child.

Her childhood in Johannesburg, education at Jeppe Primary and St Andrews High School, and

subsequent graduation from WITS as a medical doctor have all shaped her into the remarkable individual she is today.

At 20, while in her third year at WITS, her life took an unexpected turn with a diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis (MS), a complex neurological condition that posed unique challenges. Zhi's response, however, was equally unique. Embracing change with grace, she adapted gradually, mastering the use of a mobility scooter and facing life's unpredictability head-on.

Her rotations at Baragwanath Hospital provided insights into the fragility of life, further inspiring her dedication to health. Beyond her professional life, Zhi finds strength in her mother's adaptability and open-mindedness. These values are reflected in her creative pastime – crafting intricate paper flowers, each one a symbol of endurance and resilience.

"Just like these flowers," she muses, "we can create lasting impressions that require little

maintenance. They don't need water or sunlight." With this sentiment, with her positivity, strength, and enduring spirit, Zhi leaves an ineradicable mark on all who have the privilege of knowing her. Just like her paper flowers, her impression is everlasting. She reminds us that every stumble has a purpose, and the reasons often become clear with time.

In a world where challenges bloom unexpectedly, Zhixin's story is a reminder that we can all craft enduring joy, just like the paper flowers she so lovingly creates.



Cancer Surveillance System Challenges in South Africa



By Laura De Almeida & Babongile Ndlovu

Cancer is an escalating public health concern, and healthcare systems must be prepared to respond to this crisis. Effective cancer surveillance systems are therefore critical for directing cancer policy, decision-making, and intervention strategies.

On August 22, 2023, the National Cancer Registry (NCR) hosted a Cancer Surveillance Workshop to review the current cancer surveillance status in South Africa (SA), discuss challenges, and explore collaborative opportunities. Additionally, a platform was given to stakeholders to make contributions and recommendations towards building an effective cancer surveillance system.

The workshop emphasised the significance of accurate cancer statistics and reporting, as they inform the nation about the cancer burden and support effective policy-making and intervention programmes. As a way forward, a proposal was introduced for a cancer surveillance working group to strategise, align with the NCR plan, and

collaborate with stakeholders to strengthen the system. Institutions expressed interest in partnering with the NCR to ensure progress and strengthen the cancer surveillance system.

The main challenges the NCR faces are the funding of cancer surveillance activities, data access, and data quality. The current cancer surveillance reports only report on incidence; they lack mortality and survival statistics, which can provide a more holistic report of a disease. Delegates expressed disappointment in cancer surveillance not receiving sufficient funding, reporting non-compliance from data sources, and cancer reporting incompleteness.

In SA, cancer surveillance is governed by Regulation No. 380 of the National Health Act of 2003. This regulation appoints the NCR as the cancer surveillance agency in SA and gives it the authority to collect, record, validate, store, manage, analyse, interpret, and report all data relating to cancer.



Attendees of the Cancer Surveillance Workshop listen intently to the speaker, eager to learn about the current cancer surveillance status in South Africa, discuss challenges, and explore collaborative opportunities.



In-person attendees of the Cancer Surveillance Workshop gather in front of the PRF Training Centre, prepared to take on the cancer challenges in South Africa.





Malaria programmes have reduced incidence by at least 98%...

The NICD's contributions to the **National Malaria Research Conference 2023**

By Basil Brooke

The 8th Malaria Research Conference was held in Pretoria from the 1st – 3rd of August 2023. The malaria research community from across South Africa and the broader Southern African region meets at this annual event. **This year's conference theme was: On the road to elimination... Are we there yet? The consensus was 'no yet', although there is significant progress.**

Malaria programmes have reduced incidence by at least 98% - a notable achievement. There is, however, much work still to be done and partner organisations have a vital role to play going forward. Operational research in malaria links closely to parasite and vector surveillance, and this is the primary aim of many projects run by staff and students of the NICD's Centre for Emerging Zoonotic and Parasitic Diseases (CEZPD). There were several oral and poster presentations by CEZPD members, a plenary by Prof Basil Brooke, and sessions chaired by Dr Jaishree Raman and Prof Brooke.

Research from CEZPD highlighted the problem of ongoing residual malaria in South Africa despite control interventions and included an exposé on the need to track and treat all carriers of malaria. This will

mean strengthening the provincial health systems still negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Malaria importation, antimalarial drug resistance, insecticide resistance in vector populations, outdoor biting and resting vectors, and weakened provincial health systems pose the greatest challenges to malaria elimination in South Africa.

The CEZPD therefore has an important role to play in the drive towards elimination by tracking antimalarial drug resistance and insecticide resistance, providing quality assurance for malaria diagnosis and vector control, guiding vector surveillance to map risk and receptivity, conducting research into medically important aspects of vector and parasite biology, assessing innovative control methods, and providing expert advice on case management.

Most notably at the conference, Prof Lucille Blumberg, an honorary member of CEZPD, was awarded the South African Medical Research Council's Lifetime Achievement Award for her immense contributions to South Africa's malaria control and elimination efforts. It is hard to imagine a more worthy recipient and we extend our sincere congratulations to her.



Guardians of Health and Safety - Our Collective Responsibility



Dr Kovashnee Naidoo is the Head of the Health And Safety Committee



Mr Herman Geyer is the Secretary of the Health And Safety Committee

By Laura De Almeida

Embarking on a transformative journey circa 2003, the NICD Health and Safety Committee (HSC) sowed the seeds of an exceptional platform, igniting dynamic discussions while encapsulating the well-being of the NICD workforce. The HSC supports laboratories during safety-related crises, training, and ongoing issues that require intervention. This helps the committee achieve their ultimate goal of establishing a strong and resilient safety culture centred on efficient and safe work practices on the Sandringham campus.

Dr Kovashnee Naidoo currently heads the committee as chairperson, with Herman Geyer as the committee secretary. What began as a team of Health and Safety Representatives (HSR) has morphed into a league of other pertinent members of the safety team, with the committee boasting ten International Federation of Biosafety Associations (IFBA) certified professionals in biorisk management.

The HSC, steadfast in its pursuits, is actively procuring mobile evacuation kits for labs to ensure safer emergency evacuations. The committee is also procuring ergonomically suited sharps containers for proper tip disposal within biological safety cabinets, as well as surge protector adaptors to safeguard equipment not supported by UPS.

The committee's key focus is to remove accumulated chemical waste from the NICD's campus. Despite obstacles, such as supplier issues and procedural challenges, the committee has diligently crafted an emergency plan, reconciled waste lists, and is pressing for a prevention strategy with upper management.

Its unwavering commitment lies in continuously seeking avenues for enhancement. The HSC holds significant importance within the NICD, dedicating itself to establishing a secure and healthy work environment for all staff members.





Equipping for Success: Preparing for the United Nations Secretary-General's Mechanism Missions

By Kokeitso Matjane & Anastasia Trataris

The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) in partnership with the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) facilitated a Basic Training Course for rostered experts of the United Nations Secretary-General's Mechanism (UNSGM). The UNSGM was established by the United Nations General Assembly to carry out prompt investigations in response to allegations of the possible use of chemical, biological, and toxin weapons.

Following the successful hosting of the Basic Training Course in the preceding year, the Basic Training Course was conducted at the Regional Diagnostics Demonstrations Centre (RDDC) from the 26th of June to the 7th of July 2023. Twenty-one rostered experts, nominated by their respective governments and representing 19 different countries attended this training event. The course curriculum covered the UNSGM mandate and history, roles and

responsibilities of nominated experts, and guidelines and procedures. The United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) shared guidance on operational safety and security, cultural awareness, mission planning, communication strategy, and field communication. The NICD provided technical instruction on risk assessment and personal protective equipment, sampling, sample packaging and transport, and decontamination, whilst external partners presented on forensics, chain of custody, mis- and dis-information, on-site or in-situ analysis, information gathering, and interviews. The course also featured a brief field exercise set up to simulate an investigation.

South Africa is one of the few countries on the roster representing the Global South and is therefore highly valued for its contributions to strengthening the mechanism.

Figure 1



Figure 1: The composition of experts on the UNSGM 562 qualified experts, 60 expert consultants and 88 analytical laboratories nominated by Member States from all UN regions listed on the roster (as of 30 December 2022). (source: <https://disarmament.unoda.org/wmd/secretary-general-mechanism/>)



ACHIEVEMENTS



1. Sinenhlanhla Jimoh, Senior Communications Manager at the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), was elected Co-Chair of the Public Health Risk Communication and Community Engagement, Community of Practice for Africa (PH-RCCE-CoPA) at a meeting in July in Kampala, Uganda. The meeting was organised by the World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa (WHOAFRO) and the African Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC).

The meeting's goal was to promote best practices, continuous learning, and knowledge exchange. There were 48 African Union (AU) member countries in attendance. Sinenhlanhla is excited to work with the newly elected Chairperson, Dr Da Costa Aboagye, and the rest of the steering committee.

2. Gloseije (Jessy) Bazolana, Acting Head of Information Technology at the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), was recently recognised as one of 50 top leaders in Information Technology by the 50 Digital Tech Leaders to Watch group, which honours influential leaders driving technology forward at the Sandton Convention Centre on the 20th of July 2023.



ACTING APPOINTMENTS

Dr Susana Nzenze

Dr Susan Nzenze was appointed as the Acting Head of the Division for Public Health, Response and Surveillance (DPHSR) as of 01 July 2023.

Ms Kgaogelo Mkwanzazi

Ms Kgaogelo Mkwanzazi was appointed as the Acting Human Resource Manager for the NICD as of 01 July 2023.





HERITAGE AND DIVERSITY PARK FOR ALL: A HERITAGE DAY CELEBRATION!



By Laura De Almeida

The NICD will celebrate Heritage Day at **Heritage and Diversity Park for All** on September 29th, 2023. This will take place at the NICD Reception Parking Lot, and all staff are welcome to drop by at their leisure between 13:00 and 16:00.

Each centre or department will have the freedom to celebrate Heritage Day as they wish at the NICD Heritage and Diversity Park. There will be tables, seating, facilities, and gazebos, so everyone can celebrate in comfort.

Whether you want to have a braai, a snack, or sip on some cool NON-ALCOHOLIC beverages while basking

in the delightful weather, each centre will have the liberty to curate their own experience at the park. And for those who just want to unwind, the park is yours to enjoy!

The NICD is committed to celebrating the cultural diversity of our people, and by going to Heritage and Diversity Park for All, we have the chance to come together and celebrate being South African in a good old-fashioned Mzansi setting!

For more information: Contact LauraD@nicd.ac.za or NandeH@nicd.ac.za

What are people saying on social media?



National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD)
20,598 followers
3w · 🌐

Drumroll, please! Introducing South Africa's first ever Public Health Bulletin, the Public Health Bulletin South Africa (PHBSA). The Public Health Bulletin South Africa is a flagship journal for South Africa and will house research for both communicable and non-communicable diseases. To learn more, follow the PHBSA on Facebook, LinkedIn & Twitter [Public Health Bulletin South Africa](#) and visit the website at: <https://buff.ly/45prcND>
[#PHBSALaunch](#) [#AdvancingPublicHealthThroughResearch](#)

ADVANCING PUBLIC HEALTH THROUGH RESEARCH

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157 5 comments · 30 reposts

Kristian G. Andersen
@K_G_Andersen

Very excited to officially announce this [@gatesfoundation](#) funded collaboration with our colleagues at [@nicd_sa](#) and [@Scalene](#). Led by [@josh_levy](#).

Will help enable scalable multi-pathogen wastewater surveillance, building on amazing ongoing work [@nicd_sa](#).

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Scripps Research

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNICABLE DISEASES
Division of the Research Health Laboratory Service

Ellen Serapelo(MBA) · 3rd+
Clinical Manager-Dental
Great initiative 🍌

Like · 🗨️ 1 | Reply

Seymour Williams · 3rd+
Technical Deputy Director, Workforce Institute and Development Branch at...
getting the word out on public health work, well done, great opportunity for SAFETP to get published 🍌

Like · 🗨️ 1 | Reply · 1 Reply

beowulf888 @beowulf888 · Sep 6
That's great news! But only South Africa?

🗨️ 1 🔄 🍌 42 📌

NICD @nicd_sa · Sep 7
Hi there, the grant is supporting the application of novel bioinformatic tools for molecular sequence analysis of pathogens in wastewater. It is exploratory research which requires developing and refining in the context of a functional wastewater-based epidemiological...

🗨️ 1 🔄 🍌 2 📌 24 📌

NICD @nicd_sa · Sep 7
surveillance system – such as is available in South Africa. Once refined, the next stage of the project will be to roll these tools out on a broader scale.

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