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ACADEMIC AND PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES

Validation of Oxford Cognitive Screen: Executive Function (OCS-EF), a tablet-based executive function assessment tool amongst adolescent females in rural South Africa

National Library of Medicine | 5 May 2021

Kirsten Rowe, Mihaela Duta, Nele Demeyere, Ryan Wagner, Audrey Pettifor, et al.

Short, reliable, easily administered executive function (EF) assessment tools are needed to measure EF in low- and middle-income countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa given the prevalence of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)-associated neurocognitive disorder. We administered Oxford Cognitive Screen—Executive Function (OCS-EF) to 932 rural South African females (mean age 19.7 years). OCS-EF includes seven tasks: two hot inhibition tasks (a modified Iowa Gambling Task, emotional go/no-go) and five cool EF tasks, two switching tasks (visuospatial rule-finding, geometric trails) and three working memory tasks (digit recall, selection and figure drawing). We performed confirmatory factor analysis testing whether a three-factor, two-factor hot-cool, two-factor working memory and inhibition/switching, or one-factor EF model fitted the data better. The three-factor (switching, inhibition and working memory) model had the best local and global fit ($\chi^2(11) 24.21$, $p = 0.012$; RMSEA 0.036; CFI 0.920; CD 0.617).

An unorthodox Geopolitical-epidemiological approach to address the COVID-19 global vaccination distribution

Journal of Community Medicine and Public Health Reports | 25 May 2021

Federico de Cosio, Beatriz Diaz-Apodaca, Hector Ojeda-Casares, Lorely Ambriz

Besides the COVID-19 pandemic, the world is also facing a COVID-19 vaccination turmoil. At present, COVID-19 vaccines are available in limited quantities, and when they are available, they are already reserved for high-income countries that have established bilateral agreements with vaccine pharmaceutical manufactures. The dilemma about vaccine quantities and accessibility has reached critical inefficiency levels, as access to them is inequitable as some countries and pharmaceutical companies have prioritized bilateral agreements. There is a “moral failure,” leaving behind the most vulnerable population around the world. Consequently, the rich and the poor must work together through a collaborative effort to set priorities based on a geopolitical-epidemiological approach, which first identifies countries that are at the highest risk and driving the burden of the pandemic. Secondly, decisions are

made based on epidemiological evidence to support decision- and policymakers. Standardized mortality ratios (SMR) should be used to prioritize COVID-19 vaccine access because of the limited number of them worldwide, leaving at this point most countries of the world (developed and developing) with small numbers of vaccines that hardly will contribute to control, mitigate or suppress the pandemic, that is why those limited number of vaccines should be targeted to those geographic and the high risk group where the impact will be higher.

Public healthcare system capacity during COVID-19: A computational case study of SARS-CoV-2

Health Science Report | 4 June 2021

Saikat Batabyal, Arthita Batabyal

Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) is spreading typically to the human population all over the world and the report suggests that scientists have been trying to map the pattern of the early transmission of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) since it has been reported as an epidemic. Our main aim is to show if the rise-in-cases proceeds in a gradual and staggered manner instead of soaring quickly then we can suppress the burden of the health system. In this new case study, we are attempting to show how to control the outbreak of the infectious disease COVID-19 via mathematical modeling. We have examined that the method of flattening the curve of the coronavirus, which increases the recovery rate of the infected individuals and also helps to decrease the number of deaths. In this pandemic situation, the countries like Russia, India, the United States of America (USA), South Africa, and the United Kingdom (UK) are leading in front where the virus is spreading in an unprecedented way. From our point of view, we establish that if these countries are following the method of flattening the curve like China and South Korea then these countries can also overcome this pandemic situation.

Induction-phase treatment costs for cryptococcal meningitis in high HIV-burden African countries: New opportunities with lower costs

Wellcome Open Research | 5 June 2021

Bruce Larson, Amir Shroufi, Charles Muthoga, Rit Oladele, Radha Rajasingham, et al.

Introduction: Access to and the cost of induction treatment for cryptococcal meningitis (CM) is rapidly changing. The newly-announced price for flucytosine (\$0.75 per 500 mg pill) and possibly lower prices for liposomal amphotericin B (AmB-L) create opportunities to reduce CM treatment costs compared to the current standard treatment in low- and middle-income countries.

Methods: We developed an Excel-based cost model to estimate health system treatment costs for CM over a two-week induction phase for multiple treatment combinations, newly feasible with improved access to flucytosine and AmB-L. CM treatment costs include medications, laboratory tests and other hospital-based costs (bed-day costs and healthcare worker time). We report results from applying the model using country-specific information for South Africa, Uganda, Nigeria, and Botswana.

The Role of Adolescents' Personal and Social Resources in Achieving Desired Emotional and Behavioral Outcomes during an Anxiety-Provoking Pandemic Outbreak

International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health | 10 June 2021

Shira Bukchin-Peles and Tammie Ronen

Considering adolescents' developmentally driven stressors and social needs, they may be particularly vulnerable to the anxiety associated with the public health and economic crises due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, they may have difficulty following the mandated contagion prevention directives. The current study focused on the role of adolescents' positive personal resources (self-control, hope) and environmental resources (peer support) in two desired outcomes during the COVID-19 outbreak: wellbeing (i.e., maintaining/increasing positivity ratio) and contagion prevention behaviors (i.e., increasing handwashing). Path analysis was conducted using online survey data collected from a representative sample of 651 Israeli adolescents (ages 13–17). Positive resources were found to be both positively intercorrelated and negatively correlated with pandemic-related anxiety and positively with increased handwashing.

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RECENT PUBLIC HEALTH NEWS

SA's vaccine rollout passes the 1 million mark – here's which provinces are leading the race

Business Insider | 3 June 2021

South Africa's vaccine rollout has passed an important milestone by reaching more than one million people at the start of June. As the daily number of doses administered picked up – after a dismally low levels between February and May – the health department has released its first provincial breakdown of cumulative jabs. By Wednesday 2 June, a total of 1,117,569 Covid-19 vaccine doses had been administered as part of South Africa's phased rollout which aims to attain herd immunity (by inoculating 67% of the population) by May 2022. To vaccinate 40 million people within this time frame, South Africa's public and private healthcare facilities will need to average a daily tally of 120,000 doses. Although South Africa has tripled its number of daily doses administered since the first week of Phase 2 of the rollout began on 17 May, the current average of 10,644 jabs a day is still far off the mark.

'Sniper attack': Inside the Western Cape trial of a potentially variant-proof vaccine

Daily Maverick | 7 June 2021

In February, the University of Cape Town (UCT) announced that a group of its researchers was expected to start a Phase I clinical trial of an experimental Covid-19 vaccine produced by US company ImmunityBio. The experimental vaccine differs from current Covid-19 vaccines because it is designed to be more robust against the emergence of new variants. Things have progressed significantly in the more than three months since then. The second chair in the Department of Medicine at UCT and a co-investigator on the trial, Professor Graeme Meintjes, says the Phase I trial, which started in March at the Wellcome Centre for Infectious Diseases Research in Africa's Khayelitsha clinical research site, is ongoing. Vaccines are usually only approved after findings from Phase III trials have been published. He says the first two cohorts of 10 participants each have been enrolled and both received two subcutaneous injections of the vaccine, three weeks apart. One cohort received a higher dose.

Coming full circle on rehabilitation—a community hospital during COVID

The BMJ Opinion | 7 June 2021

When the second wave of the covid-19 pandemic swept the UK, the general ward of our community hospital in Oxfordshire wasn't spared. Our hospital is normally an enabling environment with a strong focus on rehabilitation, but at the peak of the second wave, over half of our ward was occupied by unwell patients with covid-19. This created challenges in caring for our patients and in communication, but the lessons learnt and insights gained have changed the way I practice and will continue to do so long into the future.

This week: A new road-map to an HIV-free world in the next decade

Maverick Citizen | 7 June 2021

This week civil society will join political leaders in discussing the next 10 years of action against the Aids epidemic, the climate crisis and a pan-African future. This week the next decade of the global response to the HIV epidemic will be determined in South Africa and abroad. From Tuesday 8 June to Thursday 10 June, the United Nations will convene the High-Level Meeting on Aids. The General Assembly will assess how the impact of the epidemic has been reduced over the past five years and will adopt a "new political declaration" to steer the next decades' action against HIV. This meeting will convene a week after the 40th anniversary after the first cases of HIV was identified. Browse the extensive list of events here.

COVID-19 (coronavirus) travel advice

Mayo Clinic | 7 June 2021

Wide-spread vaccination holds promise for ending the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, but it won't happen overnight. In the meantime, continue taking precautions to protect yourself and others if you must travel. If you're fully vaccinated, you're less likely to get and spread COVID-19, but international travel can still increase your risk of getting new COVID-19 variants. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that you should avoid travel until you've been fully vaccinated when possible.

Can the vaccine rollout be sped up?

Ground up | 7 June 2021

South Africa's vaccine rollout was slow to start and even the current acceleration leaves the country far behind where it should be. A large part of the problem is global competition for vaccine supply. Yet much more needs to be done to ensure that the available vaccines get into the arms of South Africans as fast as possible. Provinces and sites are currently performing unevenly, which should not surprise us. It is not clear how the government will address this challenge, especially as the supply of available vaccines grows.

In Focus: Global strategy to end Cryptococcal Meningitis in people living with HIV

Spotlight | 8 June 2021

Cryptococcal meningitis is the second biggest killer of people living with HIV after tuberculosis (TB). For decades it has flown under the radar – despite its high mortality rate – but it is finally getting the attention it deserves with the launch of a new global initiative to end deaths due to this fungal brain infection by 2030. The initiative, launched by the United States Centre for Disease Control, Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI) and UNITAID last month, aims to get the gold standard drug to treat cryptococcal meningitis – flucytosine – registered in countries that need it. Flucytosine is still not registered in South Africa although sub-Saharan Africa accounts for over 75% of cryptococcal meningitis deaths. That it remains unregistered is due to a combination of market failures and a lack of generic players in the field although the drug is over 50 years old and off-patent.

South African healthcare company soars after Alzheimer's drug approval

Business Tech | 8 June 2021

Share in Life Healthcare Group – a South African private hospital operator – soared in trade on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange on Tuesday (8 June), after the US Food and Drugs Administration approved Biogen's Alzheimer's drug. Biogen Inc's controversial Alzheimer's disease therapy was approved by US regulators, a landmark decision that stands to dramatically change treatment for the debilitating brain condition, Bloomberg reported. The Food and Drug Administration granted the antibody therapy an accelerated approval, meaning that Biogen will need to conduct more research to establish its benefits for it to remain on the market. CCMDD: "The right medicine, for the right patient, in the right parcel, in the right place, at the right time."

9 massive problems with government's NHI plans – which still need to be addressed before the end of the year

Business Tech | 9 June 2021

Government plans to move forward with the implementation and establishment of a National Health Insurance Scheme (NHI) in South Africa – with phase two of the scheme scheduled to begin in 2022. However, there is a glaring lack of clarity around the roadmap for the scheme – and a legal minefield covering the current processes, says legal firm Werksmans Attorneys. According to the firm, the processes are divided into two phases, with phase one setting out certain objectives that have to be met on or before 31 December 2021.

SA records over 8000 new Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours

IOL | 9 June 2021

South Africa has recorded an increase of 8 881 new cases in the last 24 hours. The National Institute of Communicable Diseases confirmed that the country's cumulative Covid-19 case count had increased to 1 712 939. The death toll has increased by 129 to 57 310.

COVID-19: Numbers escalating in Free State schools

Spotlight | 10 June 2021

While it is uncertain when teachers in the Free State will receive vaccinations during this third wave, the number of COVID-19 infections and deaths in the province's schools continues to increase. So far, according to figures from the Department of Basic Education the Free State has officially reported the deaths of six learners, 75 teachers, and three non-teaching staff between the period of March 2020 to date. Most of these cases were in Motheo District, which includes Bloemfontein, followed by Lejweleputswa District, which includes towns such as Welkom.

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TRAINING AND RESOURCES

HSTi offers accredited and non-accredited short courses and full programmes

The Health Systems Training Institute (HSTi) is the training arm of the Health Systems Trust (HST), a leading force in the South African public health sector. HST was established in 1992, on the brink of democracy in South Africa, and has since played a significant role in strengthening the national primary health system through health research, informatics, clinical support, capacity-building and training.

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PUBLICATIONS AND REPORTS

Focus on foodborne diseases

Communicable Diseases Communiqué | May 2021

Burden of Disease: Foodborne diseases result in significant morbidity and mortality worldwide, affecting persons of all ages, but in particular individuals living in low- and middle-income regions of the world and children younger than five years of age. The full extent and economic cost of unsafe food remains unknown. A report prepared by the World Health Organization Foodborne Disease Burden Epidemiology Group estimates that 31 foodborne hazards resulted in an estimated 600 (95% uncertainty interval (UI) 420-960) million foodborne illnesses and 420 000 (95% UI 310 000- 600 000) deaths globally in 2010.

Global commitments, local action

UNAIDS | 3 June 2021

Four decades after the first cases of AIDS were reported, new data from UNAIDS show that dozens of countries achieved or exceeded the 2020 targets set by the United Nations General Assembly in 2016—evidence that the targets were not just aspirational but achievable. The report shows that countries with progressive laws and policies and strong and inclusive health systems have had the best outcomes against HIV. In those countries, people living with and affected by HIV are more likely to have access to effective HIV services, including HIV testing, pre-exposure prophylaxis (medicine to prevent HIV), harm reduction, multimonth supplies of HIV treatment and consistent, quality follow-up and care. “High-performing countries have provided paths for others to follow,” said Winnie Byanyima, the Executive Director of UNAIDS. “Their adequate funding, genuine community engagement, rights-based and multisectoral approaches and the use of scientific evidence to guide focused strategies have reversed their epidemics and saved lives. These elements are invaluable for pandemic preparedness and responses against HIV, COVID-19 and many other diseases.”

Update on SARS-CoV-2 variant nomenclature

WHO | 9 June 2021

The Latest on the COVID-19 Global Situation & the Main Drivers of Transmission.

Child Labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward

International Labour Organization | 10 June 2021

Published for the first time jointly by the ILO and UNICEF, as co-custodians of Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the report Child Labour: 2020 global estimates, trends and the road forward takes stock of where we stand in the global effort to end child labour.

Epidemiology and clinical characteristics of laboratory-confirmed cases of COVID-19 aged ≤ 18 years, South Africa, 3 March 2020 – 7 June 2020

National Institute for Communicable Disease | June 2021

In December 2019, a cluster of pneumonia cases of unknown aetiology was reported in Wuhan, Hubei Province China. The cause of the outbreak has since been confirmed as severe acute respiratory coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) and the disease named coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Cases have since spread worldwide, with 8 061 550 million individuals infected and 387 155 deaths reported to World Health Organization. The first case of COVID-19 in South Africa was reported on 5 March 2020 (week 8)

in KwaZulu-Natal Province. By 9 June 2020, the country had reported 52 991 cases with 66% of cases reported in the Western Cape.

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CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

Epidemiological Data Analysis Using STATA Course

Date: 14 – 18 June 2021

Place: Bloemfontein

Epidemiologists have relied on Stata for over 30 years because of its specialized epidemiologic commands, accuracy, and ease of use. Whether you are researching infectious diseases, investigating exposure to pathogens, or studying chronic diseases, Stata provides the data management and statistical tools to support your research. It also gives you the ability to make publication-quality graphics so you can clearly display your findings. The course is suitable for potential epidemiologists and biostatisticians and current researchers including clinicians, laboratory and social scientists. Participants should have knowledge of Basic Statistics and be familiar with the Statistical package Stata.

Amref Health Africa Youth and Adolescent Strategy Launch

Young people must be at the front and center of global change and innovation. The youth remain agents of catalytic development in their respective communities and beyond! The potential of Africa's 420 million youth population in shifting its socio-economic landscape in the backdrop of poor health and socio-economic outcomes cannot be ignored. Despite advancements in policy commitments to youth development, young people in Africa remain disproportionately left behind in health and social development, including facing increased barriers to quality healthcare access. For example, over the past couple of years, HIV has been the leading cause of death among adolescents (10 to 19 years) in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNAIDS, 2018), while youth account for 60% of Africa's unemployment (World Bank, 2016) - a missed opportunity to capitalize on one of the continent's greatest assets for growth. Even more crucial is the need to provide an enabling environment for the youth to exercise their right to influence decisions that affect them. As such, Amref Health Africa is increasing its engagement with and inclusion of young people in our leadership and programme implementation as emphasized in our inaugural Global Youth and Adolescent Strategy (2021-2022). The implementation of this strategy will inform the next phase of Amref Health Africa's corporate strategy, ensuring that we are youth-inclusive and youth-centric, to address the most pressing needs of this population.

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JOB OPPORTUNITIES

The Health Systems Trust currently has no available jobs.

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