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ACADEMIC AND PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES

Preparing the healthcare workforce in South Africa for short-course rifampicin-resistant TB treatment: inter-professional training and task-sharing considerations

Human Resources for Health | 6 January 2021

Jason Farley, Norbert Ndjeka, Khaya Mlandu, Kelly Lowensen, Keri Geiger, et al.

Treatment for rifampicin-resistant *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* (RR-TB) is complex, however, shorter treatment, with newer antimicrobials are improving treatment outcomes. The South African National Department of Health (NDoH) recently accelerated the rollout of 9-month, all-oral, RR-TB short-course regimens. We sought to evaluate an inter-professional training program using pre-test and post-test performance of Professional Nurses (PNs), Advanced Practice Professional Nurses (APPNs) and Medical Officers (MOs) to inform: (a) training needs across cadres; (b) knowledge performance, by cadres; and (c) training differences in knowledge by nurse type.

The promise of paediatric dolutegravir

JIAS | 31 January 2021

Rachel Golin, Jeffrey Samuel, Ryan Phelps, Udit Persaud, et al.

In 2019, fewer than 55% of the estimated 1.8 million children living with HIV (CLHIV) received life-saving antiretroviral therapy (ART). Children in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) continue to have limited access to optimal paediatric ART, and viral load suppression (VLS) rates among children remain unacceptably low. To achieve the UNAIDS 95-95-95 benchmarks for all ages by 2030 [4], there is a pressing need for LMIC to have access to robust, affordable and child-friendly paediatric ART regimens. Since 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended the use of dolutegravir (DTG), an integrase strand transfer inhibitor, as part of the preferred first-line ART regimen for all people living with HIV (PLHIV) for whom there is approved and available dosing. However, to date, DTG has only been available in LMIC as a 50 mg, film-coated tablet, a formulation that can only be used by children who weigh at least 20 kg. In June 2020, the United States Food and Drug Administration (US FDA) approved a dispersible, 5 mg formulation of DTG for use in infants and children living with HIV, and in November 2020, a paediatric DTG 10 mg scored dispersible tablet formulation (DTG10) also received tentative US FDA approval. With these approvals in place, LMIC can expect to have access to generic DTG10 available in 2021.

The impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on HIV care in 65 South African primary care clinics: an interrupted time series analysis

The Lancet | 4 February 2021

Jienchi Dorward, Thokozani Khubone, Kelly Gate, Hope Ngobese, Yukteshwar Sookrajh, et al.

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on HIV outcomes in low-income and middle-income countries is poorly described. We aimed to measure the impact of the 2020 national COVID-19 lockdown on HIV testing and treatment in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, where 1.7 million people are living with HIV.

Understanding variants of SARS-CoV-2

The Lancet | 6 February 2021

Talha Burki

Many variants of SARS-CoV-2 are emerging, but will they have different clinical effects? A new consortium is trying to find out. Talha Burki reports. All viruses mutate. But three variants of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) have raised particular concerns. On Jan 21, 2021, the UK New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG) issued a paper outlining the results from several preliminary analyses of B.1.1.7. The variant, which is highly transmissible, was initially identified in the south of England in September 2020, and has since spread to dozens of countries around the world. It carries 17 mutations in its genome, including eight in the spike protein, which forms the basis of the three COVID-19 vaccines that have been licensed in the UK. NERVTAG concluded that there was a “realistic possibility” that infection with B.1.1.7 is associated with an increased risk of death, compared with infection with the parental virus. The group stressed that its assessment was based on limited preliminary data and even if the results were confirmed, the overall risk of death would still be low.

SARS-CoV-2 transmission among children and staff in daycare centres during a nationwide lockdown in France: a cross-sectional, multicentre, seroprevalence study

The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health | 8 February 2021

Burki Eric Lachassinne, Loïc de Pontual, Marion Caseris, Mathie Lorrot, et al.

The extent to which very young children contribute to the transmission of SARS-CoV-2 is unclear. The researchers aimed to estimate the seroprevalence of antibodies against SARS-CoV-2 in daycare centres that remained open for key workers' children during a nationwide lockdown in France.

The COVID-19 Pandemic as an Opportunity to Ensure a More Successful Future for Science and Public Health

JAMA | 9 February 2021

Venkat Narayan, James Curran and William Foegen

With the advent of the 21st century, science and technology were expected to be formidable forces that would hopefully improve population health and well-being.¹ Furthermore, these forces would drive a rapidly changing and interconnected world, with communities and nations worldwide sharing common rewards (e.g, economic development, health, and welfare) and facing common risks (e.g, pandemics, chronic non-communicable diseases, environmental damage, nuclear weapons, climate change). In this context, effective governance and communications were to be cornerstones for delivering the promise of science and technology for enhancing public health. Yet the response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic in the US, one of the world's science and technological powerhouses, has not realized these hopes.² Furthermore, the pandemic has exposed critical weaknesses in the institutional systems specifically intended to protect and harness science and technology to promote personal and public health. The pandemic is thus a clarion call for a thoughtful examination of ways to bolster and modernize systems that support and guide science, technology, and public health. History suggests that major crises, such as wars, natural disasters, and pandemics can serve as a tipping point for proactive collective action. For example, reflection and lessons in the aftermath of World War II led to the creation of progressive institutions for that time, such as the United Nations, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the National Health Services in the UK. The current moment presents an opportunity to think boldly and to imagine a better world beyond the tragedy of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Use of Intersectional Analysis in Assessing Women's Leadership Progress in the Health Workforce in LMICs: A Review

JAMA | 9 February 2021

Zahra Zeinali, Kui Muraya, Sassy Molyneux and Rosemary Morgan

Human resources are at the heart of health systems, playing a central role in their functionality globally. It is estimated that up to 70% of the health workforce are women, however, this pattern is not reflected in the leadership of health systems where women are under-represented. This systematized review explored the existing literature around women's progress towards leadership in the health sector in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) which has used intersectional analysis.

Prevention of influenza during mismatched seasons in older adults with an MF59-adjuvanted quadrivalent influenza vaccine: a randomised, controlled, multicentre, phase 3 efficacy study

The Lancet Infectious Diseases | 9 February 2021

Jiří Beran, Humberto Reynales, Airi Poder, Charles Yu, et al.

The absolute degree of protection from influenza vaccines in older adults has not been studied since 2001. This study aimed to show the clinical efficacy of an MF59-adjuvanted quadrivalent influenza vaccine (aQIV) in adults 65 years or older compared with adults not vaccinated to prevent influenza.

Tuberculosis in the Torres Strait: the lady doth test too much

Rural and Remote Health | 10 February 2021

J'Belle Foster, Ben Marais, Rotona Martin, Dunstan Peniyamina, et al.

Smear-positive pulmonary tuberculosis (PTB) requires rapid diagnosis and treatment to prevent ongoing transmission. Collection of two sputum specimens is considered the minimum requirement for the diagnosis of PTB but current guidelines in the Torres Strait Islands, Australia, recommend three sputum specimens; this frequently delays treatment initiation.

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RECENT PUBLIC HEALTH NEWS

COVAX Statement on New Variants of SARS-CoV-2

World Health Organization | 8 February 2021

The emergence of variants of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, serve as a powerful reminder that viruses by their very nature mutate, and that the scientific response may need to adapt if they are to remain effective against them. In light of recent news stories regarding the preliminary data on minimal effectiveness of the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine at preventing mild to moderate COVID-19 disease caused by the viral variant B.1.351, it is important to note that primary analysis of data from Phase III trials has so far shown – in the context of viral settings without this variant – that the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine offers protection against severe disease, hospitalisation and death. This means it is vitally important now to determine the vaccine's effectiveness when it comes to preventing more severe illness caused by the B.1.351 variant. Additional studies will also allow us to confirm the optimal vaccination schedule and its impact on vaccine efficacy. CEPI has announced funding for additional clinical research to optimize and extend the use of existing vaccines, which could include "mix-and-match" studies of different vaccines used in combinations that may improve the quality and strength of the immune response. Such studies could be useful in optimizing the use of available vaccines, including the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine. The WHO Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE) convened today to review evidence on the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine, including emerging evidence on performance against viral variants, and to consider the demonstrated impact of the product and the risk-benefit assessment for use cases with limited data. These recommendations for use of the AstraZeneca product are being finalised and will be presented to the WHO Director-General on 9 Feb 2021.

COVID-19 'extremely unlikely' to have come from a lab, experts say

UN News | 9 February 2021

The virus that causes COVID-19 probably jumped from animals to humans and is "extremely unlikely" to have come from a laboratory, the head of an international team investigating the origins of the disease said on Tuesday. Dr Peter Ben Embarek from the World Health Organization (WHO) was speaking during

a press conference in Wuhan, China, at the end of a four-week mission to the city where the new coronavirus first emerged in December 2019. “Our initial findings suggest that the introduction through an intermediary host species is the most likely pathway and one that will require more studies and more specific targeted research,” he said.

Could a Single Vaccine Work Against All Coronaviruses?

Times Live | 9 February 2021

Scientists are working on a shot that could protect against Covid-19, its variants, certain seasonal colds — and the next coronavirus pandemic. The invention of Covid-19 vaccines will be remembered as a milestone in the history of medicine, creating in a matter of months what had before taken up to a decade. But Dr. Kayvon Modjarrad, the director of Emerging Infectious Diseases Branch at Walter Reed Army Institute of Research in Silver Springs, Md., isn't satisfied. “That's not fast enough,” he said. More than 2.3 million people around the world have died, and many countries will not have full access to the vaccines for another year or two: “Fast — truly fast — is having it there on day one.” There will be more coronavirus outbreaks in the future. Bats and other mammals are rife with strains and species of this abundant family of viruses. Some of these pathogens will inevitably spill over the species barrier and cause new pandemics. It's only a matter of time. Dr Modjarrad is one of many scientists who for years have been calling for a different kind of vaccine: one that could work against all coronaviruses. Those calls went largely ignored until Covid-19 demonstrated just how disastrous coronaviruses can be.

'Mental health is the biggest threat in 2021' - SA Society of Psychiatrists

The Witness | 9 February 2021

With the sudden emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic last year and the pandemic last year and the impact of the second wave as the new year gets under way, it was perhaps inevitable that cases, if not swathes, of psychological distress would emerge. And how you manage stress is crucial in the finding some form of relief.

Explainer: how South Africa regulates medicines and vaccines

The Conversation | 10 February 2021

COVID-19 has raised public awareness about the role of national medicines regulatory authorities in enabling access to safe, effective and quality-assured medicines. This includes vaccines. In South Africa, the pandemic has also exposed a number of important misperceptions, among the public and health professionals. The South African Health Products Regulatory Authority is responsible for monitoring, evaluating, investigating, inspecting and registering all health products. These include medicines for human and animal use, medical devices and diagnostic tests. The authority is an independent structure, located outside the Department of Health and the public service. Funded by a combination of user fees and fiscal allocation, with a small contribution from donors, it is accountable to the Minister of Health. Regulatory bodies vary around the world, but the structure of the South African authority is now closer to those of other major regulators. The decision-making power is vested in the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The CEO can appoint a range of technical advisory committees to make recommendations to inform regulatory decisions. Members of the advisory committees are drawn from academia and private practice.

Less than 2% of pregnant women in Uganda receive timely viral load testing

Avert | 10 February 2021

Public health clinic data from Kampala, Uganda suggests just 43% of women who began HIV treatment as part of pregnancy care in 2015 had a viral load test – and most had to wait more than 12 months to receive it. In line with World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, Uganda recommends that women living with HIV who begin antiretroviral treatment (ART) during pregnancy have a viral load test within six months of beginning ART and a second test at 12 months. Delays in viral load testing for pregnant women may result in late detection of treatment failure, increase maternal and newborn deaths and illness, and lead to HIV drug resistance.

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TRAINING AND RESOURCES

COVID-19 Vaccination Training for Health Workers

The National Department of Health has teamed up with the South African Vaccination and Immunization Center Department of Virology at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University and other support partners to deliver a short course and resources to prepare vaccinators to implement COVID-19 vaccination. This course is primarily for frontline health workers vaccinators.

SCORE global report on health data systems and capacity, 2020

This World Health Organization report is the first ever global assessment of country data and health information systems capacity. It assesses countries according to five aspects of SCORE: Survey, Count, Optimize, Review and Enable. COVID-19 has created unprecedented demand for high-quality data and highlighted the need to address long-standing data gaps. Guided by countries, the report addresses gaps and inequalities in health information systems and provides recommendations for investment in areas that will have the greatest impact on the quality, availability, analysis, accessibility and use of data. Included on the report page is a link to the SCORE Online Data Portal and an accompanying Visual Summary. These will give you access to country-validated global, regional, and country-level SCORE assessments and key findings.

EVDS Self-Registration App FAQ

Who must register on the Electronic Vaccination Data System (EVDS), how should you register, and why?

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PUBLICATIONS AND REPORTS

Definition and categorization of the timing of mother-to-child transmission of SARS-CoV-2

WHO COVID-19: Scientific brief | 7 February 2021

This scientific brief was prepared based on results of evidence synthesis and a WHO expert consultation. The WHO COVID-19 LENS (Living Evidence Synthesis) working group consolidated available evidence, based on rapid reviews of the literature and results of a living systematic review on pregnancy and COVID-19 (up to October 7, 2020), on potential mechanisms of vertical transmission of infectious pathogens, feasibility of vertical transmission of SARS-CoV-2, data related to interpretation of positive SARS-CoV-2 virologic and serologic neonatal tests, lessons from diagnosis of other congenital infections, and existing proposed definitions to classify timing of vertical transmission of SARS-CoV-2. WHO convened a multidisciplinary, international panel of experts between October and November 2020 to review the evidence and propose a consensus initial classification system for the timing of vertical transmission of SARS-CoV-2. The panel included experts in obstetrics, neonatology, paediatrics, epidemiology, virology, infectious disease, congenital infections, and placental pathology. The selection of the panel ensured geographic representation, gender balance, and no important conflicts of interest, in accordance with WHO standard procedures.

Weekly epidemiological update

World Health Organization | 9 February 2021

Over 3.1 million new cases we reported last week, a 17% decline compared to the previous week. Although there are still many countries with increasing numbers of cases, at the global level, this trend is encouraging. The number of new deaths reported also fell for a second week in a row, with 88 000 new deaths reported last week, a 10% decline as compared to the previous week. This brings the global cumulative numbers to 105.4 million cases and 2.3 million cases since the start of the pandemic. In this edition of the COVID-19 Weekly Epidemiological Update, special focus updates are provided on: How COVAX is distributing the first COVID-19 vaccines to prioritized countries in all six WHO regions, as well as on SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern.

The Hygiene and Health Report

Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council | 2020 – 2021

This report is a collaboration between Essity and the UN-hosted Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC). We are highlighting two themes - how hygiene and health can save and improve lives and how all of us collectively can contribute to more inclusive societies. The right action can improve hygiene and health conditions globally and benefit both individuals and society. We invite you to take part in this important mission.

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CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

Young Women and Girls Programming in South Africa: Where are we Going and How could we get there Faster?

Following the release of the Zimele Appraisal: A look at three years implementing the Global Fund's Young Women and Girls Programme in the Western Cape, South Africa, the Desmond Tutu Health Foundation will lead a discussion on best practices for adolescent programming to improve sexual and reproductive health outcome, including HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancy, and female empowerment, across the second decade of life. The discussion will include a reflection on lessons learnt and look forward to map out the best routes and approaches to take from here.

Date: Tuesday, 16 February 2021 at 12:00

WHO COVID-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP) Civil Society Consultation

The C-TAP Secretariat together with its implementing partners is holding a meeting with representatives of civil society organizations to present an update on C-TAP progress as well as to discuss key aspects of C-TAP implementation, such as IP licensing and technology transfer challenges for COVID-19 health related technologies.

Date: Tuesday, 16 February 2021 from 14:00 – 16:00 CET

Email CallToAction@who.int to register your participation, noting your name, position title, civil society organization name and email address.

Invitation to webinar on Pre-Diabetes and COVID-19: A Deadly Combination

The University of KwaZulu-Natal's College of Health Sciences invites you to a webinar panel discussion titled "Pre-Diabetes and COVID-19: A Deadly Combination."

Date: Thursday, 18 February 2021 from 15h00 - 16h00

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JOB OPPORTUNITIES

HEALTH SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING (HSS) UNIT: Area Co-ordinator (HSS)

Closing Date: 19 February 2021

HEALTH SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING UNIT: District Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Officer

Closing Date: 19 February 2021

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