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## ACADEMIC AND PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES

### **Acceptability, feasibility, and impact of a pilot tuberculosis literacy and treatment counselling intervention: a mixed methods study**

*BMC Infectious Diseases* | 18 May 2021

*Stephanie Law, Boitumelo Seepamore, Olivia Oxlade, Nondumiso Sikhakhane, Halima Dawood, et al.*

There is a need for innovative strategies to improve TB testing uptake and patient retention along the continuum of TB care early-on in treatment without burdening under-resourced health systems. We used a mixed methods approach to develop and pilot test a tuberculosis literacy and counselling intervention at an urban clinic in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, to improve TB testing uptake and retention in tuberculosis care.

### **Healthcare beliefs and practices of kin caregivers in South Africa: implications for child survival**

*BMC Health Services Research* | 22 May 2021

*Khuthala Mabetha, Nicole De Wet-Billings, Clifford Odimegwu*

Appropriate health-seeking practices may have a positive influence on child survival, particularly when practiced by kin caregivers of children who are below the age of 5 years. While literature has shown that children who are raised in kinship care often present with poor health outcomes and often have unmet healthcare needs, the health-seeking behaviours and practices of the children's kin caregivers that ultimately influence these health outcomes remain largely unknown. In this paper, we explored the healthcare beliefs and practices of kin caregivers in South Africa on child survival.

### **Patient care and clinical outcomes for patients with COVID-19 infection admitted to African high-care or intensive care units (ACCCOS): a multicentre, prospective, observational cohort study**

*The Lancet* | 22 May 2021

*The African COVID-19 Critical Care Outcomes Study Investigators*

SARS-CoV-2 has overwhelmed health-care systems by causing high rates of critical illness. The global case fatality rate of COVID-19 is approximately 3%, with older people (eg, people older than 62 years) who have comorbidities known to be more susceptible than younger people. Moreover, there is a concern

of further mortality with subsequent waves across regions globally. Our hypothesis was that critically ill patients with COVID-19 might have worse health outcomes in Africa than other continents because the ability to provide sufficient care is compromised by having a small workforce, having a low number of intensive care facilities, and the scarcity of critical care resources. We also hypothesised that unplanned admissions would further adversely affect critical care outcomes in Africa as the ability of health-care systems to respond to meet the clinical workload is limited. Finally, patient outcomes following critical care for COVID-19 were not sufficiently documented in this under-resourced environment, despite a call for prevention and response measures in low-income and middle-income countries.

### **HIV in the age of COVID-19**

*The Lancet Infectious Disease | June 2021 edition*

*Talha Burki*

As the world marks the 40th anniversary of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, we ask what impact the COVID-19 pandemic is having on HIV programmes around the world. Last year, UNAIDS warned that if the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted access to antiretroviral therapy (ART) for 6 months, sub-Saharan Africa could see an additional 500 000 deaths from AIDS-related illnesses. Thankfully, the world has avoided such a catastrophe (at least, for now). The global HIV/AIDS data for 2020 have not yet been released, but the indications are that provision of ART has largely been maintained. Nonetheless, the pandemic has had a dramatic effect on HIV/AIDS programmes. Vital services have been suspended and fewer people have been initiated on ART. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has stated that “there is no scenario in which we can achieve the progress we want against HIV...while COVID-19 remains unchecked and systems for health are threatened”.

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## **RECENT PUBLIC HEALTH NEWS**

### **WHO issues new guidance for research on genetically modified mosquitoes to fight malaria and other vector-borne diseases**

*World Health Organization | 19 May 2021*

New guidance from the World Health Organization (WHO) sets essential standards to inform future research and development on genetically modified mosquitoes, particularly in addressing issues relating to ethics, safety, affordability and effectiveness.

Malaria and other vector-borne diseases, including dengue and Zika, affect millions globally. More than 400 000 people a year die from malaria alone. If proven safe, effective and affordable, genetically modified vector mosquitoes could be a valuable new tool to fight these diseases and eliminate their enormous health, social and economic burden. The guidance framework for testing genetically modified mosquitoes, developed in partnership with TDR, the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases, and the GeneConvene Global Collaborative, an initiative of the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health, describes best practices to ensure that the study and evaluation of genetically modified mosquitoes as public health tools is safe, ethical and rigorous. Current strategies for limiting transmission of mosquito-borne diseases are only partially effective. New, complementary approaches are needed to close the gaps in current vector control interventions, such as effective control of outdoor biting, and to provide alternatives to manage the increasing threat of insecticide resistance. Research suggests genetically modified mosquitoes could be a powerful and cost-effective tool to supplement existing interventions.

### **2 000 breast cancer survivors set to benefit from knitted prosthetic breasts**

*Health-E News | 26 May 2021*

Women who cannot afford silicone prostheses or breast reconstruction will benefit from the Knit-for-Cansa project. Women who have had a mastectomy [a surgical removal of the breast] and cannot afford breast reconstruction surgery or silicone prostheses are set to benefit from the Knit-for-Cansa project which aims to provide at least 2 000 women with knitted prosthetic breasts. Helping Hand and the Cancer Society of South Africa (Cansa) joined forces to have these knitted breasts ready in time for Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October. “This year, in collaboration with Cansa and the FroueVonds, we are tackling the Knit-for-Cansa Project under the banner of #BosomFriends,” says Benette Welman, Project Organiser

at Solidarity Helping Hand and the FroueVonds.

### **Right of reply: Vaccine rollout — it's not so simple, argues health department**

*Daily Maverick | 26 May 2021*

In an **article** on 24 May, GroundUp editor Nathan Geffen and Spotlight editor Marcus Low questioned the slow rollout of vaccines in the first week of the programme, suggesting changes that could be made to speed up the process. Here, Nicholas Crisp, deputy director-general in the National Department of Health, responds.

I respect the work that GroundUp does but I am afraid that I found this article a rushed and sloppy job and am disappointed that you did not take time to contact anyone who could have helped you to understand the issues that you raise in the article. It will be good if we can assist in answering some of the technically difficult issues for your readership.

### **Doctors have mental health issues too**

*Mail & Guardian | 26 May 2021*

Mental wellness and stability is a fragile gift that we often take for granted until it is threatened or completely stripped away from us. I am a medical doctor who has been living with bipolar disorder since the tender age of 14. My illness is older than my medical degree as a result. Despite this, my accolades have often been undermined because of the stigma that results from my vulnerable state of relapse. In South Africa, 26 May marks Bipolar Awareness Day on the mental health calendar. Unfortunately, many are unaware of this day including those of us who live with this illness.

### **Registered on EVDS but no confirmatory SMS? Health Dept to investigate glitches**

*Cape Talk | 27 May 2021*

The National Health Department's Dr. Nicholas Crisp says officials are following up after some over-60s registered on the EVDS system but never got a confirmatory SMS. The national Department of Health (DOH) says it's working to iron out some issues with the electronic vaccination data system (EVDS). Dr. Nicholas Crisp, who is overseeing the national EVDS system, says the portal is being adjusted to respond to the Phase 2 rollout as more vaccine centres come online. There have been some complaints about the registration process - including concerns that some over-60s are still waiting for a confirmatory SMS several days after they signed up for their vaccine.

### **Health professionals are worried that the NHI will become the 'Eskom' or 'SAA' of healthcare in South Africa**

*Business Tech | 27 May 2021*

The National Healthcare Professionals Association (NHCPA) have questioned the establishment of South Africa's new National Health Insurance (NHI) and the government's ability to run it. Presenting to parliament on Wednesday (26 May), NHCPA president Dr Benny Malakoane said that the organisation broadly supported the bill and its objects. However, he raised concerns around the NHI Fund and how it will be run – citing the failure of other state-owned companies in recent years. "Unfortunately following the finalisation on NHI it will be the biggest parastatal in the country and given government track record with parastatals, one has to be really concerned," he said.

### **COVID-19: What is the correct way to report vaccine-related adverse events?**

*Spotlight | 27 May 2021*

Phase two of South Africa's COVID-19 vaccine rollout aiming to vaccinate citizens over the age of 60 years is underway and members of the public are being asked to report any mild, moderate or severe adverse events experienced after receiving their jabs. Reporting adverse events is a critical part of monitoring vaccine safety once a vaccine has been rolled out to the broader population. The timeous reporting specifically of serious adverse events means a specialist review or causality committee can either rule out or confirm whether there is a link to the vaccine.

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## **TRAINING AND RESOURCES**

## **Webinar: Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of Communicable Infections – 2019 Guidelines Update**

Purpose of the webinar is to update the participants regarding the development in the PMTCT programme and on the implementation 2019 PMTCT guidelines:

- Provide information regarding key issues in the implementation of the 2019 PMTCT guidelines.
- Provide information on the safety of DTG in WOCBP.
- Provide information on the status of syphilis in pregnant women and notification of congenital syphilis.
- Provide updates on the use of PrEP in pregnant women.

Date: 2 June 2021

Time: 9:00 (Johannesburg)

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## **PUBLICATIONS AND REPORTS**

### **Monthly COVID-19 in children**

This report is made up of epidemiology and clinical characteristics of laboratory confirmed COVID-19 among children and adolescents aged ≤18 years in South Africa (1 March 2020 – 1 May 2021).

### **Core Indicators for Monitoring the Ending the HIV Epidemic Initiative (Early Release)**

The Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America (EHE) initiative leverages critical scientific advances in HIV prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and outbreak response. The goal of the initiative is to reduce new HIV infections by 75% in 5 years and by at least 90% in 10 years. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) routinely releases HIV Surveillance Data Tables on the core indicators for EHE to allow for more timely monitoring of progress.

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## **CONFERENCES AND EVENTS**

### **Webinar – Getting on the same page: The concept and assessment of health systems strengthening**

*ReBUILD for Resilience | 25 May 2021*

It is vital to understand and get a few answers to important questions if we are to grasp Health Systems Strengthening (HSS) and its assessment. Some of these key questions cover how we define HSS. How do we assess 'strengthening'? Should it be in terms of outcomes (based on access, coverage, equity, quality and security) or should it be based on 'attributes' (eg resilience, responsiveness, learning)? Is assessing strengthening different from assessing performance? There's a lot that needs to be clarified and this webinar, 'Getting on the same page: the concept and assessment of 'health systems strengthening', attempted to do just that. The first presentation by Sophie Witter reflected on the challenges in evidence particularly in health systems in low- and middle-income countries. She revealed that there are challenges based on definition, particularly on the fact that there is no clear consensus on how to define HSS. She presented a few definitions that were predominantly conceptualized by global institutions but notably, not usually by the people working within these health systems themselves.

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## **JOB OPPORTUNITIES**

The Health Systems Trust currently has no available jobs.

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