



CATEGORIES

[Academic and Peer Reviewed Articles](#)

[Recent Public Health News](#)

[Training and Resources](#)

[Publications and Reports](#)

[Conferences and Events](#)

[Job Opportunities](#)

ACADEMIC AND PEER REVIEWED ARTICLES

A historic achievement in a year of turmoil

The Lancet Global Health | 1 October 2020

On World Polio Day 6 years ago, we wrote in an Editorial that “2014 has not felt like a good year for infectious disease control”. Little did we know what lay ahead. Yet in 2020—a year of unprecedented disruption at the hands of a new human pathogen—the transmission of an old and more deadly and disabling virus was formally declared over on a continent with some of the weakest health systems in the world. The certification on Aug 25 that the African region is now free of wild poliovirus was a truly historic moment. Back in 2014, WHO declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern over markedly increased international spread, including from Africa, and in 2016 WHO revoked Nigeria's recently achieved polio-free status after several cases of wild poliovirus were discovered in Borno state. Genetic analysis pointed to long-term undetected transmission—a devastating setback borne of prolonged conflict that had destroyed health-care delivery infrastructure and severely restricted surveillance.

Functional dependence among older adults: a cross-sectional study with a rural population of southern Brazil

Rural and Remote Health | 1 October 2020

Rodrigo Dalke Meucci, Andrea Silveira Lourenço Aguiar de Oliveira, Gabrielle Caseira Araújo et al

Brazil has a rapidly aging population, yet little is known about the occurrence of functional dependence in the rural older adult population. The objective of this study was to estimate the prevalence of functional dependence and its associated factors among community-dwelling older adults in the rural area of the municipality of Rio Grande, Rio Grande do Sul state, Brazil. The study confirmed that functional dependence in rural areas can be even worse than in the urban context. The lack of infrastructure, architectural barriers, loneliness and social isolation are characteristics that may exacerbate physical limitations and accelerate the deterioration of the health of older adults. Based on the present study's findings, family health teams can identify individuals at higher risk of functional dependence and propose strategies to prevent or postpone decline in functional capacity.

The where, when, and how of community-based versus clinic-based ART delivery in South Africa and Uganda

The Lancet Global Health | 1 October 2020

Jean B Nachega, Geoffrey Fatti, Alimuddin Zumla and Elvin H Geng

Antiretroviral therapy (ART) can suppress HIV plasma RNA concentrations and harmful effects of the virus. However, at present, only about 60% of people living with HIV are virally suppressed. Therefore, global public health programmes urgently need innovative approaches to improve the rapidity and durability of engaging patients in treatment. In this issue of *The Lancet Global Health*, Ruanne Barnabas and colleagues report results of the Delivery Optimization of Antiretroviral Therapy (DO-ART) study, a multicentre, randomised trial comparing community-based ART initiation, monitoring, and resupply with use of a hybrid approach (ART initiation at the clinic with community monitoring and resupply), and with standard clinic-based ART delivery among individuals from South Africa and Uganda with detectable HIV viral load.² The investigators hypothesised that community-based ART could overcome logistical barriers, simplify monitoring and ART resupply, and increase viral suppression rates, especially among men, enough to make community-based interventions cost-effective. They found that community-based initiation and treatment significantly increased viral suppression compared with standard clinic-based care among all participants from 63·1% to 73·9%, and among men from 54·3% to 73·2%. The hybrid approach registered smaller but similar effects.

Inference of person-to-person transmission of COVID-19 reveals hidden super-spreading events during the early outbreak phase

Nature Communications | 6 October 2020

Liang Wang, Xavier Didelot, Jing Yang, Gary Wong et al

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) was first identified in late 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China and spread globally in months, sparking worldwide concern. However, it is unclear whether super-spreading events occurred during the early outbreak phase, as has been observed for other emerging viruses. In this paper, the authors analyse 208 publicly available SARS-CoV-2 genome sequences collected during the early outbreak phase. They combine phylogenetic analysis with Bayesian inference under an epidemiological model to trace person-to-person transmission. The dispersion parameter of the offspring distribution in the inferred transmission chain was estimated to be 0.23 (95% CI: 0.13–0.38), indicating there are individuals who directly infected a disproportionately large number of people. Our results showed that super-spreading events played an important role in the early stage of the COVID-19 outbreak.

[\(Return to Top\)](#)

RECENT PUBLIC HEALTH NEWS

The first person cured of HIV has died

Health e-News | 30 September 2020

The First person cured of HIV has died. Known as the ‘Berlin Patient,’ the Timothy Ray Brown succumbed to leukemia but remained HIV-negative. The first person cured of HIV has died, the International AIDS Society said on Wednesday. Timothy Ray Brown was cured of HIV in 2008 after undergoing a complex stem cell transplant for lymphoma. Dubbed as the “Berlin Patient,” Brown succumbed to leukaemia, which had recurred in the last six month. While the leukaemia entered his spine and brain, Brown remained HIV free. He was 54. “We owe Timothy and his doctor, Gero Hütter, a great deal of gratitude for opening the door for scientists to explore the concept that a cure for HIV is possible,” the International AIDS Society said.

Has our COVID fight crippled our efforts to fight HIV and TB?

bhekisisa.org | 30 September 2020

During the HIV pandemic, doctors were traumatised by the government’s indifference towards patients’ lack of access to treatment. In the case of COVID-19, some physicians say, they have to cope with the devastating consequences of most of the country’s health resources having been allocated to one disease.

Young people discuss innovations to reduce health inequalities

UNAIDS | 1 October 2020

A virtual event held on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly used virtual reality and

extended reality technology to connect the young delegates of YOUNGA—a youth forum initiative of the Office of the United Nations Secretary-General—with influential decision-makers and industry leaders. The discussion and the following interactive question-and-answer session on global challenges and how to create solutions for a more inclusive and sustainable world used three-dimensional avatars of each panellist and participant. On the event's panel were Tanaka Chirombo, representing the Global Network of Young People Living with HIV, Daniel Nagel, representing Youth Against AIDS, Dilnaz Kamalova, the co-creator of Sequence, an application that helps to monitor a person's daily intake of medicines, and Praddep Kakkattil, the Director of Innovations at UNAIDS.

Breast Cancer Screening and COVID-19: What Patients Need to Know Now

Breast Cancer Research Foundation | 2 October

Breast Cancer Research Foundation (BCRF) researcher, Dr Wendie Berg, outlines what happened to breast screening in the early days of the pandemic—and what is safe now.

Women living with HIV are more likely to access HIV testing and treatment

UNAIDS | 5 October 2020

In nearly all regions, women living with HIV are more likely to access HIV testing and antiretroviral therapy than men, in part due to better health-seeking behaviour among women and the existence of HIV-related services designed specifically to reach women (such as services to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission that are provided during antenatal care). In 2019, treatment coverage globally was 12 percentage points higher among women living with HIV than among men living with HIV, and viral suppression was 10 percentage points higher. This treatment gap among men living with HIV contributes to the higher number of new HIV infections among women in sub-Saharan Africa. Recent longitudinal studies have shown how closing these gaps accelerates declines in the incidence of HIV among women, especially young women.

Sex workers continue to face threat of rape and abuse from police

Health e-News | 6 October 2020

Sex workers continue to demand decriminalisation, saying outdated laws contribute to their abuse at the hands of police, and discrimination in society. Sex workers will continue to face abuse and human rights violations as long as sex work remains criminalised in South Africa, say advocates. Sex workers taking part in a dialogue on the impact Covid-19 had on them say they face abuse on a daily basis, very often at the hands of police officers. The South African National AIDS Council (SANAC) and the Departments of Social Development, Justice, Police and Health and the UNDP were part of the dialogue held on Monday.

Curiosity 10: #Mood

University of the Witwatersrand | 6 October 2020

Curiosity, September 2020: This year we have been forced to reflect on our mental health and wellbeing, what matters in life, our dependence and interdependence on others, how we live, learn, work and socialise, and has given us an opportunity to reimagine the future. The World Health Organization predicts that mental health, a veiled enemy, will be our greatest challenge in the next decade. Our research makes a critical contribution to better understand the most pertinent questions around mental health and wellbeing through expert analysis and commentary on mental illnesses, and neurosciences broadly, and all the socio-economic, political, psychological, legal, ethical, cultural, technological and other interpretations thereof.

Even a 'tiny patch of nature' in a front garden reduces stress and makes people happier

PA Science | 6 October 2020

Researchers found that having plants in a front garden reduced levels of the stress hormone cortisol. Adding just a few plants to a bare front garden can lower stress levels and help people feel happier, research suggests. Researchers introduced ornamental plants such as juniper, azaleas, clematis, lavender, daffodil bulbs and petunias into small bare front yards in economically deprived streets in Salford, Greater Manchester. The study by the Royal Horticultural Society and the universities of Sheffield, Westminster, and Virginia in the US then measured the stress levels of residents taking part in the scheme and asked them how they felt. Some 42 residents with 38 gardens were involved in the study, with one group starting a year later to act as a control group. Residents could each receive one tree, one

shrub, one climber and enough smaller plants, bulbs and bedding plants to fill two containers. They were not required to look after the plants, as the containers were “self-watering” with a 22-litre in-built reservoir of water, but they were encouraged to take part in gardening their plot, with help from the RHS advisory team.

[\(Return to Top\)](#)

TRAINING AND RESOURCES

Guidance on COVID-19 for the care of older people and people living in long-term care facilities, other non-acute care facilities and home care

World Health Organization | 5 October

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, this guidance provides information on infection and prevention control (IPC), community preparedness, self-care for wellbeing, and preparation for the "new normal". This guidance is for older people, their friends and families, caregivers, healthcare providers, long-term care (LTC) providers and community/regional/national leaders. A facility where older people receive care (including LTC facilities, non-acute care facilities, home care services, etc.) should practice IPC and prevent social isolation of older people. Communities should continue to provide integrated care to support older people. Regional and national leaders should strengthen their efforts in the "new normal" for older people by promoting self-care, use of IT, community-based care and age-friendly environment. These will create the foundation for "new future", beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, where communities recognize people's health as an integral infrastructure, and are supporting older people to stay healthy, thrive, and age-in-place.

Community engagement: a health promotion guide for universal health coverage in the hands of the people

World Health Organization | 5 October

Using the five health promotion actions described in the Ottawa Charter – namely: (i) developing personal skills, (ii) strengthening community action, (iii) creating supportive environments, (iv) building healthy public policy, and (v) reorienting health systems – a platform for community engagement can be constructed in any setting. All or any of these health promotion actions can be used in a setting or locality to create the “glue” – community engagement – that ties communities to the UHC agenda and the SDGs. Member States have used ‘healthy settings’ (i.e. places where people live, work, learn and play – whether they are cities, islands, schools, marketplaces or even hospitals) to be the interface between communities and the health system. A renewed engagement with communities and healthy settings with a sharper focus on equity, inclusion and social coherence will place UHC into the hands of the people.

Feeling stressed? New WHO guide that provides techniques to help you cope with stress is now available on WhatsApp Inc.

World Health Organization | 5 October

Check it here: 📱 https://lnkd.in/dA_pKbh.

Basic Epidemiological Concepts - 2020 (2nd cohort)

Virtual Campus for Public Health of PAHO/WHO | 5 October

The Skills Online Program aims to help public health practitioners develop and strengthen their knowledge and skills in order to make better-informed public health decisions. The EPI1: Basic Epidemiological Concepts module is the first in a set of three modules on epidemiology in public health and is the only one currently being offered through PAHO's Virtual Campus for Public Health (VCPH). The module provides an introduction to some key epidemiologic concepts, allowing participants the opportunity to enhance their understanding of the fundamentals of epidemiology, and build skills in applying basic epidemiological principles to their work as public health practitioners.

Life under Level 1: Here's what international travel looks like

Bhekisisa | 6 October

As part of South Africa's response to the coronavirus pandemic, a risk system was created based on the country's COVID-19 cases and health system capacity. Under level 1, the lowest of the alert levels, South

Africa reopened its borders on 1 October. The guidelines provide an overview of what new travel restrictions and regulations entail.

[\(Return to Top\)](#)

PUBLICATIONS AND REPORTS

The Global Fund Results Report 2020 is out:

Health programs supported by the Global Fund partnership had saved 38 million lives as of the end of 2019. Overall, the number of deaths caused by AIDS, TB and malaria each year has been reduced by nearly 50% since the peak of the epidemics in countries where the Global Fund invests. It is important to recognize that this achievement is the result of efforts by a wide array of actors comprising the Global Fund partnership, including significant investments and initiatives implemented independently of the Global Fund. Key partners contributing to the progress against the three diseases include implementing countries; civil society groups; people affected by the diseases; bilateral partners such as the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI), Agence Française de Développement, the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, Germany and Japan; key multilateral and technical partners such as World Health Organization, UNAIDS, the RBM Partnership to End Malaria, the Stop TB Partnership, Unitaid and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance; private sector partners such as (RED); and foundations such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The South African Health Review (SAHR) 2021 Call for Abstracts is now open!

Health Systems Trust | Closing date: 31 October 2020

Prospective authors are invited to submit abstracts that examine health-sector responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly from the perspectives of strengthening health systems; leadership and governance; resource allocation and financing; service delivery, human resources, and medical equipment and supplies. Please click on the link below for further details.

[\(Return to Top\)](#)

CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

UCT Vice-Chancellor's Open Lecture by guest speaker Amina J Mohammed, titled 'Decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals: So What?'

14 October | 18:30 - 19:30

5th Public Health Conference – Theme: Accelerating progress towards Universal Health Coverage

14 October 2020 | Gallagher Convention Centre

This conference will gather leading experts across the public health spectrum to build on the global commitments and experiences learned from pioneering African countries who are implementing UHC. The agenda will adopt a whole-system approach to achieving UHC and will consider both the supply and demand side interventions. This 1-day conference will be an ideal event for public health professionals, the private health sector and civil society to hear from national and international experts on concrete actions to achieve UHC by 2030. Conference chair: Dr Moeketsi Modisenyane, Director: International Health and Development, National Department of Health; President, PHASA, Johannesburg, South Africa

[\(Return to Top\)](#)

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

There are currently no job openings at the moment. Visit the Health Systems Trust for any new updates:

<https://www.hst.org.za/Pages/Careers.aspx>.

[\(Return to Top\)](#)



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