

BHP Participates in COVID-19 Study



Principal Investigator, Professor [Mosepele Mosepele](#)

BHP is living true to its mission of fighting emerging public health challenges through innovative research and capacity building that impacts policy and practice. In addition to participating in and assisting the National Health Laboratory SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19 national testing effort, the BHP is collaborating with the University of Botswana, and the Sir Ketumile Masire Hospital in a COVID-19 Cohort Study led by Prof Mosepele Mosepele.

Dr David Lawrence Study Physician announced the enrolment of the first participant into the study on the 20th of August 2020 with the study enrollment standing at 53 study participants as at October 06, 2020. The study, called COVID-19: An observational cohort of cases

treated in Gaborone aims to understand the COVID-19 epidemic in Botswana, with a particular focus on the relationship between COVID-19 and HIV. The study will describe the presentation, severity, clinical course and outcome of individuals who are diagnosed and treated with COVID-19 in Gaborone.

It will also compare the difference between HIV-infected and HIV-uninfected individuals, determine the impact of COVID-19 on HIV infection, and determine if individuals with HIV infection are infectious for longer than those without HIV. The study will recruit individuals with COVID-19 at Sir Ketumile Masire Teaching Hospital (SKMTH).

...continuation from Page 1

“Through this study, we shall also develop a bio-repository of samples that can be used to further understand the virology, immunology, genetics, and new diagnostics for SARS-CoV-2,” Said Dr Lawrence.

Dr Lawrence has commended all the partners for playing their part in ensuring that the study becomes a success.

“I would like to thank everyone for all their hard work up to this point. This is an entirely locally led protocol and it has been a true team effort across all collaborating partners including the Presidential Task Force. This collaboration is particularly remarkable and sets the tone if we are to overcome the COVID-19 epidemic in Botswana and comes at a time when we are all working harder than ever before even within our own programmes to meet the challenge of COVID-19,” he said.

For his part Prof Mosepele said “It is important to harness local skills and resources to demonstrate our research capacity and expertise in Botswana which has been evident throughout the HIV/AIDS era as we encounter these new public health challenges. Indeed we are ready to contribute to generalizable knowledge to combat COVID-19 locally, regionally and globally”

He further extends appreciation to all the investigators and partners for their enthusiasm and commitment to the project.

“We look forward to successful recruitment and using our expertise here in Botswana to assist with the COVID-19 response,” he said.



“This is an entirely locally led protocol and it has been a true team effort across all collaborating partners including the Presidential Task Force”

Study Physician, Dr David Lawrence

BHP takes part in Worldwide Week at Harvard University

The Botswana Harvard AIDS Institute Partnership (BHP) has been invited to take part in the commemoration of the Worldwide Week at Harvard, which took place this fall from 05-09 October 2020. The Worldwide Week at Harvard advances the university's mission by showcasing the breath of and promoting awareness of Harvard University's international engagement.

During this week, Harvard schools, research centers, departments and student organizations host academic and cultural events as part of the commemorations. This year, the Vice Provost for International Affairs at Harvard University, Prof Mark C. Elliot extended the invitation to BHP, as it is one of the university's affiliated research centers. Prof Elliot also serves on the BHP Board of members.

"There is much to be learned from the valuable work from your labs, and I would be honored to work with the BHP team to help spotlight your work and provide an opportunity for you to share the impact that BHP has made across the region since its inception," said Prof Elliot.

This fall, the Worldwide Week at Harvard will focus on a new initiative called 24 Hours of Harvard (24hH) in which programming of activities will be concentrated into a single day to present the geographic breadth of the university's teaching and research mission.

"There are no shortage of relevant conversations relating to the work of the hospitals and labs connected with BHP. I think 24hH may be an excellent opportunity for you to share BHP's good work with the greater Harvard community," added Prof. Elliot.

In response to the request, BHP in collaboration with the Chair of the Board of Directors Roger Shapiro has produced a Corporate Video highlighting BHP research and capacity building initiatives in the fight against HIV/AIDS and other emerging health challenges. The video will be part of the 24-hour programming lineup of events and activities. This programming of 24 consecutive hours is meant to demonstrate that at any hour of the day or night, Harvard teaching, research, learning, and outreach is happening somewhere in the world.

"The aim of the 24hH is to highlight the geographic breadth of the University's teaching and research activities by including 24 consecutive hours of Harvard programming from around the world. Harvard has extraordinary resources around the globe, which I believe advance the University's mission tremendously. 24H aims to highlight that good work," explained Prof Elliot.

Prof Elliot also noted that the events for both Worldwide Week and the 24hH initiative shall be virtual as a way of keeping the community safe in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic while continuing with the tremendous mission of the University.



Vice Provost for International Affairs at Harvard University ,
Prof. Mark C. Elliot

"There are no shortage of relevant conversations relating to the work of the hospitals and labs connected with BHP"

Dr Seatla presents study to NIH Director



BHP Scientist, Dr Kaelo Seatla

The Botswana Harvard AIDS Institute Partnership (BHP)'s Scientist Dr Kaelo Seatla, a BHP PhD fellow was awarded an HBNU Fogarty Global Health Fellowship commencing 1st July 2020-30th June 2021. Dr Seatla's project under this award aims for World Health Organization(WHO) validation of an 'in-house' BHP developed genotyping resistance assay that will detect dolutegravir resistance mutations at a fraction of the current commercial assay costs.

Dr Seatla's project was selected for presentation to National Institute of Health (NIH) Director, Dr Francis Collins. Dr Seatla was amongst the only four out of 15 new awardees from over 100 Fogarty Global Health fellows who were selected to present their research projects to the Director. The selection of Dr Seatla is demonstration of his immense capabilities as a young

clinician and scientist as well as highlighting the overall appeal and significance of the BHP for its mentorship and research projects.

Dr Seatla pitched his study on 15th July 2020 on performing the WHO validation of his 'in-house ' HIV-1 drug resistance assay with plans of implementing it for routine patient care use in Botswana.

In his presentation, Dr Seatla noted that Botswana has a high HIV-1 prevalence of 17.6% He explained that Dolutegravir (DTG) is a potent anti-HIV-1 drug and that DTG based regimens are recommended as preferred first line ART in many HIV treatment guidelines including Botswana. However, he stated that resistance to DTG could occur especially amongst treatment-experienced patients experiencing virological failure (VF).

He said that resistance to ARVs causes the virus not to be suppressed thereby increasing the chances of onwards transmission of the virus. He revealed that determining for DTG resistance in resource limited settings such as Botswana can be expensive and prohibitive. To address this problem, Dr Seatla has developed a low cost in-house assay that will help in determining DTG resistance.

“As part of my PhD work, we have developed a low cost in-house assay that identifies DTG drug resistance mutations. This in-house assay performs quite well, with similar performance characteristics as compared to current commercial assays- but at about 75% less of the costs of the commercial assays,” he said.

He stated that the low cost assay will increase access to low cost drug resistance testing in Low and Middle Income Countries (LMIC) thus ensuring that people living with HIV (PLWH) in such countries are afforded a right to have drug resistance testing done if experiencing VF while on DTG based regimens and that they are placed on efficacious ARV regimens.

With increased viral load testing, coupled with drug resistance testing, Dr Seatla believes that more people will achieve virological suppression, ensuring that there is no onwards transmission of the virus, and ensuring that the last 95 of the UNAIDS 95-95-95 goals of having 95% of PLWH being virologically suppressed are surpassed.

Dr Seatla expresses his sincere gratitude to his mentors for this project, Dr. Simani Gaseitsiwe, Dr. Shahin Lockman, his Supervisor at the University of Botswana, Prof Ishmael Kasvosve, SANTHE and BHP for their invaluable support and mentorship that has made the award possible.

The Global Health programme for fellows and scholars of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Fogarty International Center supports collaborative mentored global health research training opportunities in low and middle-income countries.

The programme supports seven consortia, including the Harvard University, Boston University, Northwestern University and University of New Mexico (HBNU) Fogarty Global Health training programme which is funding Dr Seatla's study.



NIH Director, Dr Francis Collins

About NIH-Director, Dr Francis Collins

Dr Francis Collins is a physician-geneticist noted for his landmark discoveries of disease genes and his leadership of the international Human Genome Project, which culminated in April 2003 with the completion of a finished sequence of the human DNA instruction book.

He has also served as director of the National Human Genome Research Institute at NIH from 1993-2008.

Dr. Collins oversees and manages the work of the largest supporter of biomedical research in the world, spanning the spectrum from basic to clinical with an annual budget of \$ 42 Billion USD per year.

He has been awarded a USA Presidential Medal of Freedom, was appointed by Pope Benedict XVI to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences amongst many awards.

Mogae & Faust commend BHP for stellar HIV Response



Former President of Botswana, Dr Festus Gontebanye Mogae

Former President of the Republic of Botswana, Dr Festus Gontebanye Mogae and former President of Harvard University, Dr Drew Faust have acknowledged Botswana Harvard AIDS Institute Partnership (BHP) for its role in the HIV/AIDS response.

President of Botswana from 1998 to 2008, Dr Mogae had made HIV/AIDS response one of the top priorities for his administration. Speaking during a video shoot of the BHP to commemorate the inaugural Harvard University World Wide week “24 Hours of Harvard”, that took place on the 7th October 2020.

Dr Mogae who is hailed for driving a successful national response to HIV/AIDS lauded the invaluable role that the BHP and Harvard University through The Harvard T.H Chan School of Public Health (HSPH) has played and continues to play in the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

“BHP had a very important impact in our handling of the

AIDS epidemic because it came at a time when we were in the middle of the pandemic and we were challenged to our utmost and they brought knowledge, they (with HSPH) were objective professionals and they participated with us in the fight against the epidemic at a time when we were said to be the most seriously affected country in the world by HIV/AIDS,” said Dr Mogae.

The Former President stated that he remembers the BHP as an institution and people who were knowledgeable about the problem the country was facing as well as individuals who interacted with the leadership, guided and assisted them professionally.

“They played a very important role in the fight against the pandemic precisely because of their professional competence but also their encouragement as human beings. We came to appreciate very much when they seemed to share every concern we had. They inspired us and they became friends with us. That is how I remember them especially the personalities,” he said.



Former President of Harvard University, Dr Drew Faust

The former statesman also took the opportunity to acknowledge the founding Chairman of the BHP, Prof. Max Essex who helped with the establishment of the institution. "I cannot disassociate Prof Max Essex from the Botswana Harvard Institute program because he led the program as a professional and also as a human being who was empathetic with us," said Dr Mogae.

Former President of Harvard University, Dr Drew Faust has also praised BHP for positive impact of its discoveries in improving the health of the people. Dr Faust counts her visit to the BHP as one of the highlights of her tenure as Harvard President.

"One of my most memorable experiences I had during my time as Harvard President was a visit I had an opportunity

to make to the Botswana Harvard Partnership in 2009. Max Essex who was my generous host showed me both the research and clinical operations and I felt so proud to be associated with an institution that was making possible the inspiring and important work," she said.

She points out that one particular aspect of her visit that she will never forget is when she had a meeting with a group of young HIV positive mothers and their HIV free adorable toddlers.

"I could see the impact of the discoveries and treatments the partnership had made possible. I asked one of those young mothers what were her hopes for her adorable little girl and she looked at me and said I want her to go to Harvard," said Dr Faust.

BHP mourns the passing of Board Director, Dr George Onkabetse Matlho



The Late Dr George Onkabetse Matlho

The Botswana Harvard AIDS Institute Partnership (BHP) is mourning the untimely passing of 55 year old BHP Board of Director, Dr George Onkabetse Matlho who died on September 25, 2020 after a short illness.

Dr Matlho BVSC, MSc, MBA, graduated with a Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine in New Zealand in 1991, worked as Veterinary Officer and Senior Veterinary Officer in the Department of Veterinary Services from 1992-1996 before joining the Botswana Vaccine Institute in 1997 as Chief Veterinary Officer, eventually being appointed General Manager in 2005 until his untimely death. The Botswana Vaccine Institute (BVI) manufactures livestock vaccines for cattle and livestock industry in Botswana, two thirds of which are exported to other African Countries and the Middle East.

It also hosts the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) Reference Laboratory for Sub Saharan Africa for Foot and Mouth Disease.

Dr Matlho was appointed to the BHP Board of Director's in 2012. This was in recognition of the interphase and complementation of animal and human science, and the impact of livestock in general public health. This was no coincidence since the BHP itself was founded and led by Professor Max Essex himself a Veterinarian.

In his condolence message to the BVI and the Matlho family, and on behalf of the Chair of the Board of Directors, Professor Roger Shapiro, Chair of the BHP Board of Members and Dean of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Michelle Williams, Vice Provost

International Affairs, Professor Mark Elliot, and the BHP family, Dr Makhema, BHP Chief Executive Officer recognized Dr Matlho for his steady presence and contribution in the BHP transformative strategy over the years.

“Despite his tremendous responsibilities at The Botswana Vaccine Institute and other major professional commitments, George was a valued Board Director of the Botswana Harvard Institute. He was always available to share his scientific and leadership expertise to advance the mandate of the BHP, in her mission to fight HIV/AIDS and emerging Public Health Challenges,” said Dr Makhema.

The BHP CEO says Dr Matlho’s death is a significant loss at a time when contributions of every talented leader has never been more critical as Botswana and the World grapple with the global public health COVID-19 crisis.

“The BHP shall miss his strategic advice and leadership” said Dr Makhema.

Speaking at the memorial service that was also streamed live on Facebook, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Food Security, Jimmy Opelo described Dr Matlho’s passing as a huge loss to Veterinary Medicine fraternity and the Agricultural Sector not only in Botswana but globally. He noted that Dr Matlho was a respected Veterinary Surgeon who was a member of a number of International Organizations including the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE).

OIE Representative for Southern Africa also representing International Friends, Dr Moetapele Letswenyo revealed that Dr Matlho’s cheerful character has earned him friends around the world. He said Matlho would lighten up a somewhat heated moment with bright smile and change the conversation into a very productive outcome.

Dr Matlho led the BVI for 15 years, having ascended to the helm at a time when the parastatal was on the brink of collapse, marred with internal instabilities and making financial losses.

The Chair of the BVI Board of Directors, Bennet Maifala pointed out that Dr Matlho led a transformative strategy, which propelled the BVI to self-sustainability graduating from dependence on Government subventions to financial independence through an expansion project that saw BVI expand its products and market base to other African Countries increasing its profit margins.

“To be blunt, Dr George Matlho is just what the Doctor had ordered for BVI,” he said

Various speakers at the memorial service described Dr Matlho as an overall cheerful and ever smiling person, a prolific dancer and footballer whose character had a tremendous positive effect on people. Dr Matlho had earned himself the nickname ‘Hero’ during his active football days. He was described as skillful with his legs and just as intelligent with his mind. His friend, Kingsley Gofhamodimo recalled how Dr Matlho scored better marks than him when they sat for Master of Business Administration (MBA) at the University of Botswana.

“I thought because I was coming from a business background and he is a Vet, it would be my time to beat him but to avail,” he said.

BVI staff shared their fond memories with GM, which they explained stood for both General Manager and George Matlho. They described how his smile brightened their day. One of the staff members, Batenegi Kalasi joked that she even told “GM” to stop shaking their hands because his soft touch always left them with somewhat ecstatic feeling. She said Dr Matlho then started greeting them with his fist but still the gesture always left them with a euphoric feeling that lightened up their day.

BVI Finance Manager, Mmabasotho Tibe who was visibly overwhelmed by emotions bluntly told the BVI board that it would not be easy to replace Dr Matlho. She said her boss had an impressive track record of making profits and increasing asset base for the BVI.

Giving Closing remarks, Assistant Minister of Agricultural Development and Food Security, Beauty Manake who is also a farmer concurred that indeed Dr Matlho was not a positional leader. She relayed an encounter she had with Dr Matlho outside Botswana where they had gone there on different missions.

“I only discovered that he is a Doctor from his Business Card,” she said, pointing to the humility that Dr Matlho carried with himself whenever he was, even outside the borders. She revealed that she had challenged Dr Matlho to expand their product profile to create opportunities to acquire new markets and leverage on the knowledge economy.

*“May His Soul Rest
In Eternal Peace”*



Share Facts About COVID-19

Know the facts about coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and help stop the spread of rumors.

**FACT
1**

Diseases can make anyone sick regardless of their race or ethnicity.

People of Asian descent, including Chinese Americans, are not more likely to get COVID-19 than any other American. Help stop fear by letting people know that being of Asian descent does not increase the chance of getting or spreading COVID-19.

**FACT
2**

Some people are at increased risk of getting COVID-19.

People who have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19 or people who live in or have recently been in an area with ongoing spread are at an increased risk of exposure.

**FACT
3**

Someone who has completed quarantine or has been released from isolation does not pose a risk of infection to other people.

For up-to-date information, visit CDC's coronavirus disease 2019 web page.

**FACT
4**

You can help stop COVID-19 by knowing the signs and symptoms:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

Seek medical advice if you

- Develop symptoms

AND

- Have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19 or if you live in or have recently been in an area with ongoing spread of COVID-19.

**FACT
5**

There are simple things you can do to help keep yourself and others healthy.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.



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For more information: www.cdc.gov/COVID19

BHP performs Jerusalema Challenge



BHP Staff performing Jerusalema Challenge

Botswana Harvard AIDS Institute Partnership (BHP) on Friday 02 October 2020 became the latest entity to join on the global dance frenzy to South African song, Jerusalema by Master KG featuring a female vocalist, Nomcebo Zikode. The song whose original video has amassed over 100,000 likes on YouTube has taken the world by storm with many inspired dance videos of the song flooding the Internet.

The Jerusalema song has inspired the world to dance and the dance challenge has gone viral with many people around the world including corporate entities performing the dance choreography of the song. Friday the 2nd October morning saw BHP staff together with executive management take it to the dance floor to perform the infectious dance challenge as part of team building and a way of refueling positive energy for work after the independence holidays.

Addressing staff after the dance, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Dr Mompoti Mmalane noted that it was important for the staff to more often take time away from their busy

desks and keep away the laboratory coats to breath in fresh air.

He said because BHP staff is essential, forever busy especially now with COVID-19, there is need for one to get away from their desks to give their day a refresh and reinvigorate.. He said "doing so would ease stress and enhance the general well being of the staff"

Performing the dance challenge was the idea of Kutlwano Gaebuse, an Information Technology (IT) Officer who saw the need for BHP staff to have fun and brighten up the day and be jolly together as a team amid the stressful work environment in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic.

"This dance is done in order to support and motivate one another in BHP. We are finding ourselves living under difficult, stressful and challenging times. As BHP family we need each other's support more than ever," said Gaebuse.

BHP Associated Research, and Associated Investigators Publications (From July to September 2020)

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