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PERFECT NEWS

PERFECT
UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE
COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES

Welcome Note

Welcome to the third issue of the UZCHS PERFECT Newsletter, a semi-annual publication that gives you (UZCHS community and stakeholders) exciting information about the PERFECT programme. Every six months, stakeholders will receive a downloadable PDF via email and or from the UZCHS PERFECT Web Portal (www.uzchsperfect.ac.zw).

I hope you will enjoy reading this issue and subsequent issues of the UZCHS PERFECT Newsletter.

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Trainee collaborates with the University of Wollongong, Australia

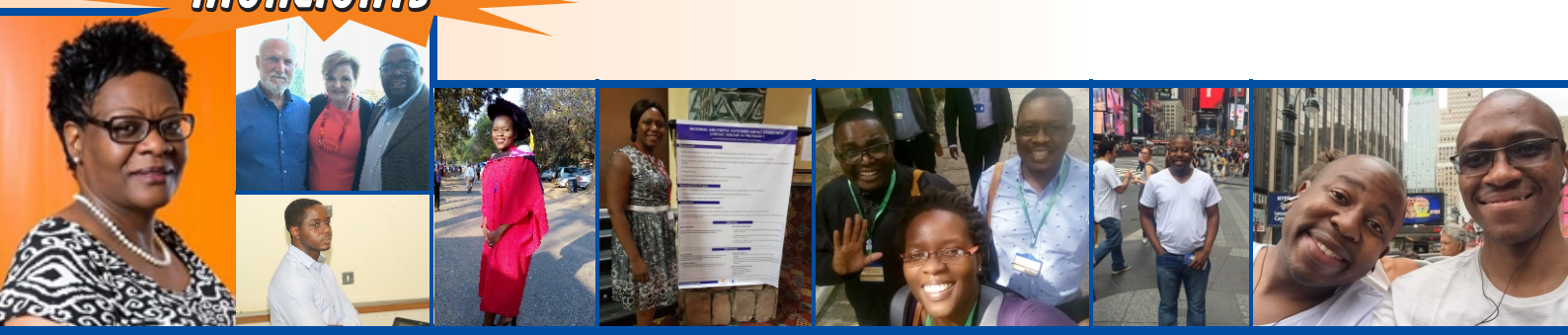
Mrs. Nyaradzai Mnambah, a 2nd cohort trainee and lecturer in the department of Rehabilitation at UZCHS was nominated to be a team leader of her research group to lead the Zimbabwean cohort for a landmark international study titled, 'SUNRISE Study'. SUNRISE is an acronym for International Surveillance Study of 24 hour Movement Behaviors in the Early Years. The SUNRISE Project will initially survey 4-year-old children from urban and rural areas in each country.

As of November 2017, the project had 16 countries representing each continent and from all four UN Human Development Index Levels. These countries are committed to collecting data for the first wave of the study, which is most likely to occur in the first 6 months of 2019. In this study, children will be asked to wear an accelerometer for a 24-hour period over several days. This will allow the assessment of their physical activity, sedentary time (including screen use), and sleep.

These behaviours will then be assessed against the WHO Guidelines which are currently being developed. Other health, learning, and developmental measures will be taken to help understand how these influence 24-hour movement behaviours. Together with her team, Mrs. Mnambah as part of this study will collect the data required. The data would be owned by each country but would be stored in a central secure location to allow international comparisons and publications to be completed. The data will be a tool in each country to advocate with policy makers and practitioners for the necessary resources to support the promotion of adequate levels of physical activity, screen time, and sleep among young children.

She is planning to do this study as her PERFECT mentored project.

HIGHLIGHTS



Publications

"Rheumatic heart disease in pregnancy: a report of 2 cases"

PERFECT trainees embrace a culture of publishing research results

Three 2nd cohort trainees, Drs. Asaph Ziruma, Annie Muyotcha, and Fungisai Hove published a case report in the Pan African Medical Journal in collaboration with other researchers in the College who include Drs. Mugove Gerald Madziyire and Munyaradzi Nyakanda.

Available online at: http://www.panafrican-med-journal.com/content/article/28/298/full

HIV/AIDS Research and Palliative Care accepts Dr. Madhombiro's article "Perceptions of alcohol use in the context of HIV treatment: a qualitative study in Zimbabwe"

Dr. Madhombiro's article, has been accepted for publication by The HIV/AIDS Research and Palliative Care Journal. The study summarized the understanding by HIV infected individuals of the role of alcohol, its effects and their beliefs about interventions. The publication is Dr. Madhombiro's second publication in 2017. His first publication was titled, "A *cluster randomized controlled trial protocol of an adapted intervention for alcohol use disorders in people living with HIV/AIDS: impact on alcohol use, general functionality ability, quality of life and adherence to*

Dr Asaph Ziruma

Dr Annie Muyotcha

Dr Fungisai Hove

Dr Bryant Kendal,
Dr Mary Jane Rotheram-Borus
and Dr Munyaradzi Madhombiro at
Cape Town Alcohol HIV meeting
in November 2017

Dr. Simbarashe Chinyowa awarded the AIDS Malignancy Consortium (AMC) International fellowship grant.

Dr. Chinyowa a second cohort PERFECT Programme trainee successfully applied for the AMC 2017/18 fellowship grant. The fellowship program was established to encourage and foster the development of new and junior clinical investigators at AMC international sites to pursue careers in clinical research trials in HIV-associated malignancies within the context of the AMC. "*I am grateful and excited to have been awarded the AIDS Malignancy Consortium International Fellowship for 2017/18*", he said.

His motivation to apply for this fellowship started way back in 2010 whilst doing an attachment in General Surgery. *"I came across one of my first patients with squamous cell carcinoma of the anus. Unfortunately the disease was at an advanced stage so we did not have much to offer him in terms of treatment and he succumbed shortly after presentation. Reading around this case, I realised the close relationship between anal squamous cell cancer, HIV and human papillomavirus (HPV). This was the start of my interest in HIV/AIDS associated cancers, particularly those linked to infectious agents".*

Dr. Chinyowa decided to focus his post-graduate dissertation on the prevalence of anal HPV, abnormal anal cytology and high-grade dysplastic lesions in HIV-positive patients. He subsequently had the opportunity to present findings from his dissertation at local and international fora where they were well received. These meetings have expanded his horizons about areas requiring research in the field of anal cancer and have also afforded him an opportunity to meet various experts in this field.

On his immediate plans going forward, Dr. Chinyowa said, *"Having now qualified as a General Surgeon, I will continue to work with patients with various malignancies that include anal cancer. Through the AMC fellowship I will be able to build on my post-graduate dissertation and look into the various factors associated with persistence of anal HPV infections. I also wish to further develop skills in high resolution anoscopy and biopsy which is the gold-standard method of detecting anal dysplasia."*

Throughout the entire process of his professional development he was supervised and supported by various mentors and by the Department of Surgery, College of Health Sciences. He thanked the following Professors for supporting him in his career: GI Muguti, R Makunike-Mutasa, ZM Chirenje, M Borok (University of Zimbabwe) and J Palefsky (University of California San Francisco). "*These ladies and gentlemen have taught, encouraged and corrected me over the years and more recently, prompted me to apply for the AMC Fellowship*", he said.

Turning to the PERFECT Programme Dr. Chinyowa said, the program came at an opportune time as it is helping him improve his understanding of various aspects of research such as research methodology, research ethics, and research administration and grant writing. "*One of the most exciting aspects of PERFECT for me is that I am surrounded by fellow trainees with great zeal and ambition, seasoned mentors and experienced support staff. Together we will go far!"*
He also encouraged fellow trainees thinking about applying for a fellowship to choose a suitable fellowship then make the necessary preparations. He said common sources of fellowship information include the internet, email bulletins and interaction with established experts in your field of choice.
His favourite quote is from Whitney Young, ***"It is better to be prepared for an opportunity and not have one than to have one and not be prepared." Whitney Young, Jr., American Civil Rights Leader***

PERFECT trainee graduates with a PhD in Medicine

Dr. Tariro Mawoza who is a lecturer in the Department of Clinical Pharmacology and a 1st cohort trainee for the PERFECT Programme at UZCHS graduated with a Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Medicine from the University of Zimbabwe in September 2017. She registered as a part-time PhD candidate in 2012 and her project was titled "*Pharmacological evaluation of Sclerocarya birrea stem bark extract on vascular and extra-vascular smooth muscles*". This was a laboratory based study aimed at determining the effects that a plant, *Sclerocarya birrea*, has on different tissues in relation to contraction or relaxation effects, plant toxicity and *in vitro* effects on hypertension.

Her graduation with a PhD in Medicine comes at the time when the University is intensifying the call for all faculty to have PhDs. This was a great achievement for the Mawoza family as reflected in her statement, "*The graduation was such an exciting event for everyone especially my family, as I am the first Mawoza to obtain such a prestigious achievement. The degree took a long time to complete; I waited for it for a good five years".*

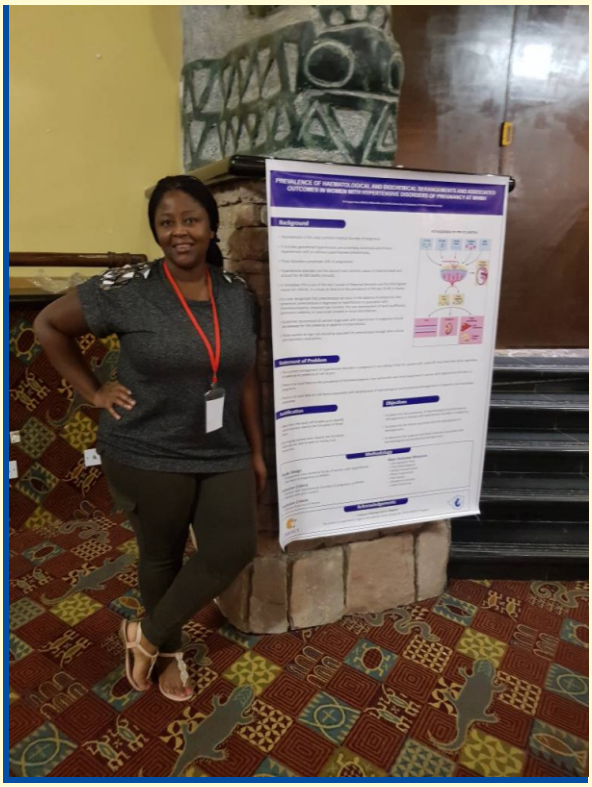
Dr. Mawoza pointed out that it was not an easy journey as she encountered countless challenges such as delays in getting chemicals from suppliers, animal shortages and laboratory frustrations. Balancing family life, work and studies were also additional challenges which she however successfully juggled. Jokingly she said, "*I always joke with my friends about how during the pursuit of this degree, I not only obtained a PhD but I also got married and had two children during those five years, which of cause, according to me, is a huge achievement!*"

She shared some lessons learnt that she thinks are important in order to succeed in PhD studies such as: time management, work life balance, and being confident as a researcher. She is grateful for the funding she received from the Southern Africa Consortium for Research Excellence (SACORE) through the WELLCOME Trust as this enabled her to conduct her PhD with all the resources she needed.

Congratulations!!!

Trainees present at Zimbabwe Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (ZSOG) Annual Conference

PERFECT second cohort trainees, Drs. Fungisai Hove and Annie Muyotcha were privileged to present posters at the ZSOG Annual Conference held at Kingdom Hotel, Victoria Falls from the 15th to the 16th of November 2017. The Conference was held under the theme, "*A Holistic Approach to Reproductive and Maternal Health.*" The Conference was aimed at building relationships among stakeholders involved in reproductive and maternal health in Zimbabwe.



Dr. Muyotcha presented a poster on maternal and foetal outcomes among women with heart disease in pregnancy in Zimbabwe. Dr. Hove presented a poster on the prevalence of hematological and biochemical derangements in women with hypertension in pregnancy and associated maternal and foetal outcomes. The presentations are part of the trainees' mentored research projects which they are pursuing under the PERFECT Programme. Both presentations were well received by the participants. The young researchers also received insightful feedback on their presentations from the participants. The results from their research will contribute significantly to the wealth of knowledge in obstetrics and gynaecology in Zimbabwe. ZSOG recognizes research as an integral part of growth and development of the health sector in Zimbabwe. Thus, research was prioritized at this conference.

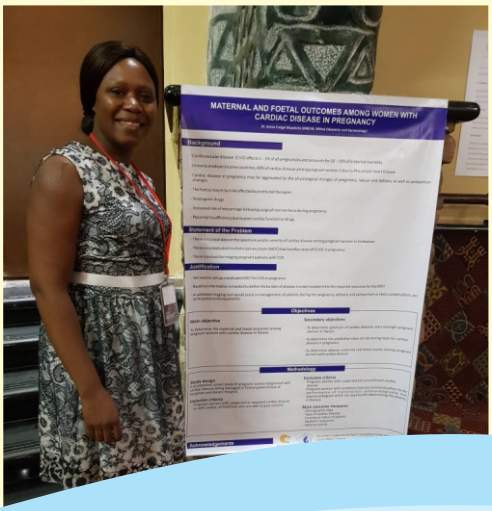
Established and young researchers were given a chance to present their abstracts and research results. Other stakeholders who participated at the Conference and presented strategies and policies on reproductive and maternal health in Zimbabwe included the Ministry of Health and Child Care MOHCC, WHO, UNICEF and MCHIP.

Dr Muyotcha, 2nd cohort trainee, reflects on her experiences at ZSOG and PERFECT

Making a presentation in a scientific or academic forum is always a great privilege and a welcome challenge. The Zimbabwe Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (ZSOG) through their scientific committee invited researchers and practitioners to attend the Annual Conference which was held from 15 to 16 November 2017 at the Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. This conference was unique in that it also had a "marketplace" where various stakeholders presented in breakout sessfons throughout the conference. One of these sessions was for recent and ongoing research conducted by members of the society. Researchers were given the opportunity to make poster presentations on their research.

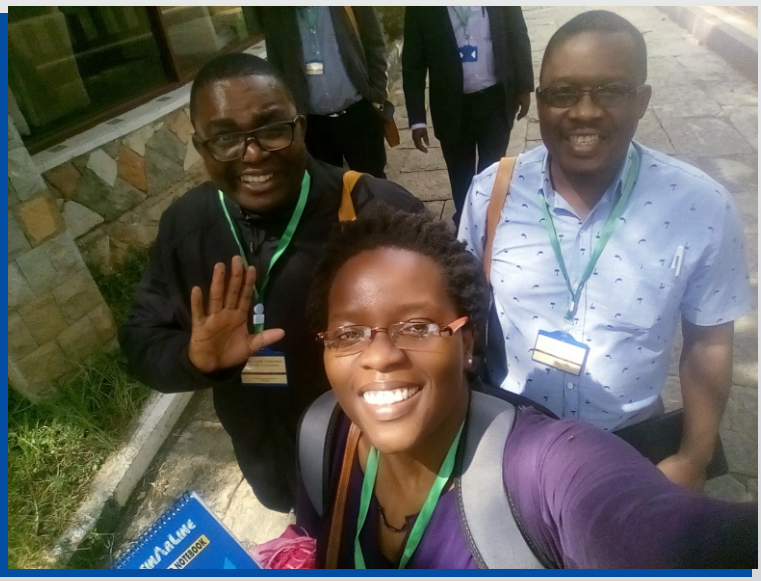
I took the opportunity to make a poster presentation of my intended research topic on **Maternal and foetal outcomes among women with cardiac disease in pregnancy** and submitted an abstract to the scientific committee. This was a good forum for discussion of the topic and research methodology with many senior colleagues and seasoned researchers who have continued to give very useful feedback and critique on my protocol since the meeting. Amongst the conference attendees were colleagues from South Africa, one of whom has worked with a team of obstetricians in Johannesburg and has conducted similar researches. He has also been very helpful in shaping my protocol.

I made the ZSOG presentation after presenting my topic to the PERFECT leadership during the program's Works- In Progress (WIP) presentation. I realise the great value that comes from sharing your work with colleagues and other researchers as it gave me an opportunity to be mentored and guided to formulate a more sound and feasible protocol. Since becoming a PERFECT fellow my understanding of research and sound science has really grown. I am grateful for the many learning opportunities we have been afforded through the program and I take this as a launch pad to a career in science and research. I would like to acknowledge all PERFECT faculty and thank my mentors Prof. Chirenje and Dr. Munyandu for their assistance. Thank you also to the PERFECT team for sponsoring my presentation at the ZSOG conference.



Annual junior faculty Networking Symposium held in Ethiopia

The inaugural Symposium for MEPI junior faculty training programs was held from the 16th to the 17th of October 2017. The main aim of the symposium was to bring together all the Principal Investigators (PIs) and junior faculty from National Institutes of Health (NIH) funded African institutions, NIH/FIC directors and international researchers from different countries to share experiences and good practices. The UZCHS was represented by Profs Hakim, and Nhachi (P.I), Drs. Mawoza and Madhombiro (Trainees) and Mr. Matsika (Training Coodinator). The Symposium presented an opportunity for the Principal Investigators and trainees/fellows to make presentations on the progress of the various training programmes and research projects in their universities.



Dr Madhombiro, Dr Mawoza and Mr Matsika

The symposium consisted of both plenary and breakout sessions. All the PIs presented their updates on the 16th while trainees presented on the 17th. The PI presentations touched on many aspects of the programmes that included:

i) The kind of trainees/fellows they recruited

ii) What their various programs entailed

iii) Reports on the different activities they had conducted since the launch of their respective programs

iv) Program success stories

v) Program challenges and the way forward

On the 17th, most of the fellows presented their research findings in breakout sessions. Dr. Madhombiro presented on the outcomes of the pilot study in his doctoral study and he obtained very useful feedback which he will use in the write up of the main study. This also helped him to redesign his analysis section for the main study. He was quoted saying, "*Due to the mock presentations we had in Zimbabwe, the presentation at the conference was easier. I therefore learnt that the smooth presentation might be enhanced by mock exercises*".

Dr. Mawoza also got an opportunity to present the results of her PERFECT study. The presentation allowed her to inform participants on the different traditional medicines that are currently being used by women in Zimbabwe during pregnancy, birth and postpartum. To her this was an exhilarating moment as she managed to show case the effects of using traditional medicines in pregnancy, one of the few studies conducted in Zimbabwe.

The trainees are very grateful to PERFECT for affording them the opportunity to attend the symposium. They got a chance to network with fellows from other NIH/Fogarty funded institutions.

Prof Nhachi, Dr Mawoza and Prof Hakim

Interview with Prof Sithole-Niang: A Seasoned Researcher

Who is Professor Sithole Niang?

Professor Sithole-Niang has a PhD in Biochemistry from Michigan State University where she specialized in molecular virology. After her doctoral studies, she pursued a post-doctoral fellowship working on the genetics of photosynthesis in cyanobacteria. She teaches molecular biology to both science and medical students at the University of Zimbabwe. She is also a researcher and conducts research on the genetic improvement of cowpea, and on bacterial metagenomics. She has keen interest on Biotechnology and Biosafety issues and has written authoritative articles on both subjects. In summary she is a biochemist who is interested in molecular biology.

She attended the University of London, on a British Council scholarship, earning a BSc in Biochemistry in 1982. When she was awarded a USAID Fellowship in 1983, Prof Sithole-Niang chose to continue with her education, studying chicken herpesviruses. She earned her PhD in 1988 from Michigan State University (MSU), Lansing, Michigan. She completed a post-doctoral fellowship at the Plant Research Laboratory at MSU studying the genetics of photosynthesis in cyanobacteria. She was awarded the first William L. Brown Fellowship which she used to develop transgenic plants whilst still at MSU. She was also awarded a Biotechnology Career Fellowship by the Rockefeller Foundation and used it to visit the Department of Plant Pathology, University of Wisconsin for three months each year for three years, where she worked with Prof Douglas Maxwell on cowpea viruses.

Prof Sithole-Niang, can you share with us briefly how you finally made the decision to specialise and become a researcher? Take us through the decision making process to become a researcher

I started the research path when I was doing my doctoral studies. I got a USAID-ZIMMAN fellowship to study for a PhD in America at Michigan State University. We were a group of 22 students, 20 men and 2 women. Michigan State University had won a bid to host us as a group. We arrived at MSU in January and had to wait to register on a program in September, as such I registered on the Lifelong education programme. This allowed me to register for courses while waiting to begin full time studies in September. When I got there, I wanted to do Molecular biology, and it was during this time that – I met two biochemists, i.e. David G. McConnell (who became my mentor) who was Professor of Biochemistry working on Biochemistry of the retina and Charles Artzen who was Director of the Plant Research Laboratory (PRL) working on photosynthesis. I got admitted to the Biochemistry programme!

The set up was such that you take 2 years to qualify for a PhD. During the first year you were required to rotate in four research laboratories acquiring the skills you felt you needed

for your PhD project. In the second year you work in your chosen field then prepare a proposal and defend it at the end of the second year. This was the qualifying examination for the PhD popularly known as a Mini Masters although the Masters degree was not awarded as they felt it was expedient to transfer to a PhD. I finally settled for a virology project working on chicken and turkey herpesviruses. I conducted this work in Dr Leland Velicer's lab, in the Department of Microbiology, Giltner Hall, MSU. He was in collaboration with Dr Hsing-Jien Kung, who later moved to Case Western Reserve University and asked me to go with him to Ohio or stay with Lee at MSU. I chose to stay with Dr. Lee Velicer at MSU as time was moving but most importantly I was already enjoying what I was doing. Dr Kung was very popular and ran a busy lab. He said "Idah you can come with me however if you stay with Lee you will get the cream of the crop"

Collaboration

I experienced collaboration when Dr Kung and Dr Vellicer were collaborating. Dr Velicer was also collaborating with Dr. Lucy Lee at the USDA Labs, Michigan. When I was a post-doctoral fellow at MSU with Dr. Lee McIntosh we collaborated with Dr. Gerald Babcock (Department of Chemistry, MSU) and Dr Charles Yocum of University of Michigan (UofM).

When I joined UZ, I collaborated with Dr. Douglas Maxwell of University of Wisconsin Madison, then with Dr Thierry Candresse of INRA, Villanave, France. I also collaborated with Prof Ab van Kammen of Wageningen Agricultural University, in the Netherlands. Later on I collaborated with Dr Larry Murdock of Purdue University, where we co-coordinate the Network for the Genetic Improvement of Cowpea for Africa (NGICA). We led a global network of cowpea scientists which saw us engaging with donors to ensure that cowpea was considered important and funded to the right levels that would bring meaningful impact to solving insect problems in the crop. This was achieved and today we witness the deployment of pod-borer resistant cowpea through trials in Nigeria, Ghana, Burkina Faso and Malawi. Unfortunately this crop will not see the light of day here at home given the country's stance on genetically modified crops (GM-crops). The sanctions on the country have meant that we do not feature in many funding initiatives. Being the consummate biotechnologist that I am and being so frustrated with this no-GM stance I have also started working on other aspects of biotechnology this time driven to develop products that I can use in different ways, be it in schools teaching and exciting students with science or indeed responding to the country's call for industrialization i.e. commercialization of biotech products. I am proud to share that I have a number of products that can be up scaled and commercialized.

My latest collaboration is with Prof Don Cowan, University of Pretoria where we work on the African Soil Microbiology Project looking at soil metagenomics from 10 countries.

Mentorship
Back to my PhD supervisor, Dr. Lee Velicer (DVM/PhD): It was fascinating doing virology with Lee as he had worked with Harold Ginsberg the father of virology. It was a joy to travel with Lee to conferences as I managed to sit with big names in virology at these conferences. I would sit at the same table, and get introduced to big names in the field! When I teach molecular virology to the first year Medical students at UZ, that lecture on herpesviruses is from the bottom of my heart!

Dave McConnell was assisting the African-American Institute in New York to interview Africans who were going to take jobs in Africa. He had interviewed Prof Chetsanga. So when Prof Chetsanga wrote to me asking if I was doing anything in agricultural biotechnology as I finished my PhD with Lee Velicer, Lee advised me that in one's career, one can always pivot at different stages in their career. That's how I changed fields and went to post-doctoral fellowship with Dr. Lee McIntosh working on the genetics of photosynthesis at the Plant Research Laboratory (PRL). The PRL also known as the MSU-DOE had well-resourced labs that had been set up to look at the long term effects of radiation on plants following the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We were working with one protein and the gene showed how the electrons move. We used in vitro mutagenesis to study the architecture of the photosystem reaction centre. This was a particularly exciting time in Photosynthesis circles as the Nobel Prize for chemistry had been one in the area of photosynthesis that same year! This group was prolific; we even had a paper published in the Journal Biochemistry that made the editor's choice for the year in Perspective of Biochemistry.

Prof, what made you to choose to remain in the academia?

Soon after my PhD an opportunity came for a career in the industry, however Dave McConnell advised me that academia was the best place to be as "Industry would chew me up and spit me out" when I ceased to be relevant!. So I continued in the academia and as a graduate student, did publish two papers in the Journal of Virology.

So Prof what challenges did you face in writing your first publication?

I was in the US; the mechanism was already there as one will be working in an area with a publishable paper. Work for a PhD is original research as such will be centred on the hottest area, interesting and its already something new to talk about. It is all about systems. The work is already cut out for publishing and systems should be in place to enable that.

Networking
It's interesting how Dave McConnell my mentor and one of two biochemists I first met at MSU enriched my network. It was actually Dave's wife, Dr. Pat Barnes-McConnell, Director of the Bean/Cowpea Collaborative Research Support Project (Bean/Cowpea CRSP) held a workshop at MSU with her global Team of research where I met Dr Larry Murdock and indeed Dr Douglas Maxwell described above.

American system vs Zimbabwe system
In USA, a Professor has a team of people and has a laboratory at the university. The construct, the design and the culture are important in medical training program. Nowadays the MD/PhD route is most popular and prestigious.

What were the challenges you faced in the research career path/being a woman?

Being a woman, work life balance is very important. I recall when my son was four months old; we went to seven West African countries! I did not slow down because of marriage and did not sit down or stop because of the baby. I made sure that I had a maid on long term basis. For sure that has been the culture in our home otherwise the work front suffers if home life is in turmoil.

What advice can you give to junior faculty?

I see there is a lot of emphasise for people who graduate wanting to just go and make it big, you need to enjoy what you are doing. In research a rolling stone does not gather any moss. Its a long term commitment. You need staying power. You cannot run off to a job for two years then think of coming back and start assembling test tubes once more. What has worked for me has been to stick my nose to the grinding stone no matter what. Perhaps that how I survived 2008!

Do you remember the number of articles you have published to date?

Over 70 publications and some are in press

How did you feel when you got your first article published?

I was very happy and it was on August 1986 in the Journal of Virology.

First grant

The first grant was interesting. When I arrived at UZ in March 1992, I talked to Prof Hasler on 30 March when she told me the deadline was the next day, 31 March. I wrote the grant overnight and got it. Whew!

Nowadays unfortunately, Zimbabwe does not qualify for too many opportunities, although for the Medical School it is different.

You have shared with us more on your personal journey in research. Now let's turn to your role in promoting research at the college. What can we say you have done for the UZ College of Health Sciences?

I run a research lab and also coordinate The MSc biotechnology Programme since 2013 following negotiations which started in 2010 to reinstate a programme that had been running since 1991 and stopped in 2007. We started with 3 students and now we have 28 students, 18 in the first year and 10 in the second year. Of the 10, 8 received DAAD scholarships. At the CHS my role is serving on the Training Advisory Committee of PERFECT which is a capacity building programme. I feel that I bring a different perspective to the programme from other programmes I have helped run in agriculture as some of them are funded by similar donors anyway.

PhD mentoring and have 4 students, i.e.

- 8 have completed PhDs to-date and 4 are ongoing in collaboration with others
- One in Biological Sciences
- One in Crop Science
- One PhD student from Midlands State University
- One PhD student at National University of Science and Technology

Msc started in 1991 and to date we have 102 graduates and 28 are in the pipeline. 50% have PhDs. Sad moment is that we have trained 8 PhDs but now the funding is dwindling.

Do you see any difference between the environment you developed to become a research and that of our current PERFECT Programme trainees?

PERFECT is a programme doing capacity building and is well resourced. I am also involved with the Joshua Nkomo scholarships a programme that funds fellows in the CHS. It now falls under the Education Committee of Higher Life Foundation

Qualifications

1979-1982 Bsc Hons Biochemistry
1983-1988 PhD Biochemistry
1988-1992 Post doctoral fellow
1992-1998 Lecturer
2004 Associate Professor
2013 Professor

Your last words? Nuggets of wisdom

Drawn from perception, today's graduates just want to make it big soon after graduation. One needs to enjoy what they do. The element of discovery is fantastic. Am now gearing for products and it's not all about money, there is need for drive and passion. Longevity is critical in research and support comes from networks.

In research,

- Do not go there and test your toes as you will go nowhere
- It is a long term commitment, be there long enough to achieve
- If you do it right then money will come to you
- You stay long term you begin to influence policy and that can be very powerful
- Build a brand.

Idah was recently elected fellow of the World Academy of the Sciences 2018!

CoZIE Corner

CoZIE is a bilateral exchange program between the Department of Medicine in the University of Colorado, School of Medicine (DOM UCSOM) and the Department of Medicine in the University of Zimbabwe, College of Health Sciences (UZCHS). CoZIE is designed to provide diverse experiences in internal medicine for faculty and postgraduate trainees, and will introduce post-graduate trainees at both institutions to modern methods of clinical teaching and clinical research.

Below are testimonies of UZCHS students who went to USA for attachments to learn advanced medical techniques and patient care skills;

Post Graduates Attachment Experiences at University of Colorado Denver

Tapiwanashe Kusotera (MMed)

It was an honour to have been selected as one of the CoZIE scholars and my trip to the United States of America was an amazing experience with lessons learnt in almost all aspects of life. Together with Kudakwashe Mandisodza we travelled to Denver, Colorado in August 2017. This was my first time in the United States and so as one can imagine, the trip itself was eye opening, from our brief stopover in New York, to our 3 week stay in Denver.

I was attached for 3 weeks at the University of Colorado Hospital, where I rotated in Infectious Diseases with Prof Campbell, Rheumatology with Prof West and Prof Kolfenbach. My last rotation was in general medicine with Dr Tanaka. Coming from a resource limited setting as ours, I was amazed by the resources available to physicians who practice in the USA.

I enjoyed seeing cutting edge technologies being applied in everyday medicine to better patient's lives, things that I had previously only read about in textbooks and articles. I also observed and was taken aback by the apparent excess in some situations. In all of this I learnt that it was important that we fully utilise the resources available to us, as little as they may be to improve the lives of our patients. I also realised that my role should not be limited to clinical work alone but that I should play the role of an advocate and continue to lobby the authorities for more resources for our patients. I also learnt the importance of good communication with patients and how simple things like this dramatically improve the quality of care. I observed that this responsibility fell on the whole team, from the consultant down to the intern. I enjoyed the warm and friendly teaching environment. We made it a point to attend the daily residents meeting over lunch, not only because of the food but also the opportunity to learn with other residents. I realised the value and strengths of our training programme as we interacted with other trainees.

Another aspect that stood out prominently was research. A lot of the people we were working with were actively involved in research and this did stimulate a desire to one day be involved in research and contribute to the growing body of medical knowledge. This trip was truly life changing. I am grateful to the 3 families that I stayed with who opened their homes and made extra effort to accommodate us, took us hiking in the mountains and did their best to show us the American way of life.

Dr Kudakwashe Mandisodza (MMed), on the right

It is true that a journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step. There are times when dreams come true though you have not dreamt of them. Going to USA as CoZIE scholar was one of those dreams. It's an honor to have been one of the CoZIE scholars, thank you for the generosity over the years which has allowed many students to travel and enjoy medicine in a first world country.

In the first week I had an opportunity to do rounds in cardiology at UC and Denver Health. I spent time in cath-labs at both hospitals and this was my first time to be in a cath-lab. It was exciting to see many procedures I had only read about or seen on videos. I did witness pacemaker insertions, PCI, TEE and SVT ablations.

I joined internal medicine interns during rounds and noon conferences. I also had the opportunity to spend time at the congenital cardiology clinic. I got to see many patients with some fascinating conditions like Ehlers danlos and Ebstein anomaly.

Just to mention I was struck left, right and center by the board hanging in the hallway with visionaries, innovators and partners. I hope one day this spirit of donating for a good cause will resonate through my country and Africa at large.

Meeting Dr Shwartz and getting to discuss the CoZIE fellowship was fascinating. I hope he will keep the exchange program running. I felt so humbled and grateful that he had made this trip possible for us, many thanks to him.

We also had an opportunity to visit the Copper Mountains for the weekend. Great views and amazing trails. It was a weekend packed with lots of outdoor activities. The Colorado Classic bike race was an exciting event to watch.

It was a great time to network and socialize and getting a feel of how medicine is practiced in a first world country. I will always be grateful and cherish the time I had in Denver-Colorado. You will never understand how this trip positively impacted my life. A great thank you to the families who hosted us during our stay. I can never thank you enough but this is a start.

Grant Writing Tips

Writing and submitting a grant application requires a great deal of time, knowledge and resources. Here are some useful tips for creating a strong, competitive grant application.

1: Read carefully and fully understand the call for applications/proposals

The call contains all of the important information required, i.e. funder, purpose, key dates, award information, eligibility information, submission information, review criteria, and award administration information. Pay attention to the keywords. If you have any queries contact the program person listed on the call to assist in clarifying the issues.

2: Develop a strong and clear research proposal

Describe the work that you are proposing to do. Think strategically about the research problem you want to study. Make sure your research methodology is feasible. Remember most applications have page limits, thus write clear, concise and meaningful sentences. Avoid sentences that are long and with complex phrases. Avoid also vague and ambiguous information e.g. objectives. Presentation and layout is critical. Use tables, diagrams and other pictorial can help to illustrate your ideas. Start writing early to allow time for polishing up your proposal.

3: Develop an appropriate budget

Remember the budget and budget justification will be scrutinized by the reviewers, thus you need to request an appropriate budget. Work closely with the finance staff in the Research Support Centre (RSC) to ensure you have correct budget allocations and that you have taken into account institutional requirements.

4: Get feedback from your peers/colleagues

Give your draft proposal to your colleagues for review. Some might have experience in grant writing or might even be reviewers, so they will provide you with useful feedback. It is advisable to link up with seasoned researchers who can be good grant writing mentors.

5: Read and learn from the reviewers

Some funders provide the review criteria or sample applications with reviewer's comments. Take time to go through these resources and ensure that you have addressed all the points highlighted in the review criteria.

6: Ensure you have taken care of all the administrative requirements

Contact the RSC early so that we can provide you with administrative support. Some funders require institutional and individual registration as they use electronic systems for submission. The process can take long, thus it is critical to contact the RSC early so that they can assist with the registration and submission. Other administrative issues include letters of support, bio-sketches/CVs, ethical issues, institutional approval policies and other additional information.

7. Spend time on the application.

Read through carefully your final application to spot any errors and to ensure that you have used the correct font and font size. Reviewers can tell when an application has been rushed. *Understand the game*: Limited funding + Lots of proposals = Only the most competitive proposals receive grant funding

8: Keep writing!

Continuing to apply for funding improves your skill sets. Whether the proposal is funded or not, the reviewers comments will help in strengthening your next application.

References:

1. https://research.uoit.ca/faculty/grant-development management/grant-writing-tips.php
2. http://www.otago.ac.nz/research/proposals/otago004485.html

TESTIMONIAL

Last year, I was sponsored by the PERFECT grant to attend the 10th Occupational Therapy African Regional Group (OTARG) conference. It is at this conference that I managed to renew my membership for OTARG and World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT).

Through WFOT links, I was seconded to respond to World Health Organisation (WHO) survey on developing guidelines for physical activity, sleep and sedentary behaviours, which I did. Later, the WHO invited me to be part of the team working on the development of guidelines for physical activity, sleep and sedentary behaviours in children under 5 years. The first meeting was done in Geneva Switzerland on the 28-29 November 2017. It is at this meeting that I met Professor Antony Okely and he extended an invitation for me to participate in the Multi-center study. Professor Antony Okely is the principal investigator for the SUNRISE project (international surveillance study of 24 hour movement behaviours in early years). I have since accepted the invitation, and now working on the research process plan.

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