

BHP Scientists receive Presidential Honours



BHP Virology Team (Presidential Order of Meritorious Service)

Botswana Harvard AIDS Institute Partnership (BHP) research scientist and laboratory director, [Prof. Sikhulile Moyo](#) and BHP Research Associate and Professor of Medicine at the University of Botswana, [Prof. Mosepele Mosepele](#) have been awarded the Presidential Order of Honour while the BHP Molecular Virology Team have been awarded the Presidential Order of Meritorious Service. Their names alongside

other awardees for the Botswana Honours and Awards 2022 were published in the Government Notice No. 348 of 2023 in the Government Gazette of 30th June 2023. The awardees received their awards on 29th September 2023, on the eve of the 57th Botswana Independence Celebrations.

Prof Mosepele and Professor Moyo were appointed to the Presidential Taskforce on COVID-19 as Deputy Coordinator and Co-Chief Scientist,

respectively. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, BHP has been contributing to the national response and working closely with the Ministry of Health in the establishment and enhancement of molecular testing capacity, SARS-CoV-2 genomic surveillance and conducting various COVID-19 related basic science research and clinical trials for therapeutic, diagnostic and effective preventative strategies.

Professor Mosepele and Dr Moyo's roles included national strategic epidemic planning and response as well as leading or participating in ongoing BHP SARS-COV-2/COVID-19 research. The BHP Molecular Virology team were at the SARS-COV-2/COVID-19 coal face participating in research while conducting SARS-CoV-2 sequencing in collaboration with the Ministry of Health (MOH), the National Health Laboratory (NHL) to augment the Government's efforts on COVID-19 response.

A major scientific accomplishment for BHP in 2022 was the discovery of theOMICRON variant of SARS-CoV-2 by Prof. Moyo and his team at the Botswana Harvard HIV Reference Laboratory (BHHRL). Prof. Moyo and the team are credited with the first sequencing of theOMICRON variant which later became the most dominant transmitted SARS-COV-2 variant globally. The discovery ofOMICRON was a result of an unequalled

Pathogen Genomic Surveillance programme at BHP which has contributed to over 5000 SARS-COV-2 whole genome sequences to the [GISAID](#), a global science initiative that provides open access to genomic data of influenza viruses and the coronavirus responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic. By sharing the data with the world, the scientists contributed significantly to a better understanding of the virus, its dynamics thus accelerating a swift response to the pandemic. The data have informed vaccine design by pharmaceutical companies to strengthen COVID-19 vaccines to fight the new variant.

For the discovery of Omicron, Prof. Moyo and his team has since received several accolades and recognition globally. He received the [German Africa Awards](#) as well as made it to the TIME Magazines' annual list of [100 Most Influential People in World](#) in 2022.

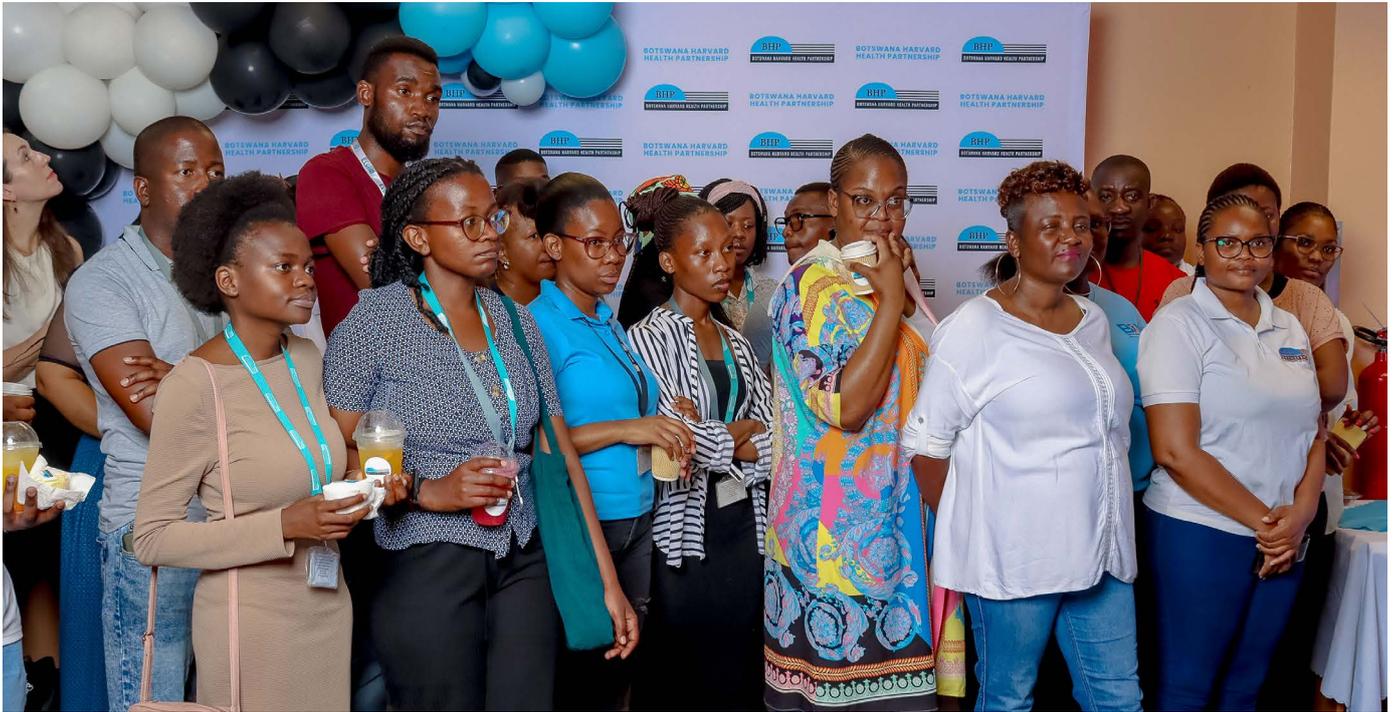


His Excellency President Masisi presenting the Presidential Order of Honor award to Professor Sikhulile Moyo



Dr Simani Gaseitsiwe received the Presidential Order of Meritorious Service award on behalf of BHP virology team

BHP launches refreshed logo



BHP Staff listening attentively to BHP Chief Executive Officer at the BHP new logo launch

The Botswana Harvard Health Partnership (BHP) on the 6th October 2023 launched its refreshed logo which reflects the change of company name from **Botswana Harvard AIDS Institute Partnership** (BHP). The new registered name; The **Botswana Harvard Health Partnership** change came into effect on the 1st November 2022. The acronym BHP will remain the same, therefore the organization still remains to be commonly referred to as **BHP**.

Structurally, the foundation of the visual identity of the brand remains the same, save for subtle changes in lettering and the removal of the words 'AIDS' and 'Institute' which has been replaced by the word 'Health' (Botswana Harvard Health Partnership). An accompanying Brand Manual has been developed to guide usage of the new logo.

Launching the logo at the Botswana Harvard HIV Reference Laboratory (BHHRL) Conference room, BHP Chief Executive Officer, Dr Joseph Makhema explained that the name change reflects changes to the company's institutional mandate under its current strategic plan and recognizes an evolving research portfolio beyond HIV/AIDS to encompass other emerging public health challenges in Botswana and across the globe.

"This is in recognition of the transition from mainly

undertaking research, training and capacity building on HIV but also on other infectious diseases including Tuberculosis, sexual transmitted diseases, hepatitis, HPV and new public health challenges such as SARS-CoV-2," said Dr Makhema

He noted that BHP's research portfolio has grown to include HIV cure research, non-communicable diseases including malignancies as well as the impact of climate change and new and emerging public health challenges as well as pathogenomics, and other epidemiologic surveillance strategies.



BHP New Logo Mark

"With this new logo, as they say, we have crossed the new Jordan of our era and we hope that with renewed identity and vigour, we shall continue breaking new grounds to expand our research portfolio and succeed against emergent public health challenges" said Dr Makhema.

The CEO pointed out that with the new logo, BHP shall continue to demonstrate its commitment to strengthening public health systems and conduct focused research that will provide guidelines for the country and the world. He also thanked all stakeholders involved in the conduct of BHP research, including BHP staff and study participants.

Speaking on behalf of the staff, Dr Gbolahan Ajibola thanked BHP management for the refreshed identity which reflects the organisation's broadened mandate beyond HIV/AIDS. He encouraged fellow BHP staff members to be ambassadors of the organisation and wear the BHP badge with pride.



Division of AIDS visits BHP



Group photo of BHP staff with the DAIDS delegation

The [Division of AIDS \(DAIDS\)](#)'s Office of Clinical Site Oversight (OCSO) visited the Botswana Harvard Health Partnership (BHP) on the 15th to 16th August 2023. The two-day visit was meant for OCSO to appreciate the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health-BHP Clinical Trials Unit (CTU) processes and tour the facilities. The DAIDS four-person entourage included OCSO Director, Manizhe Payton, OCSO Programme Officer Representative, Teri Greenfield, OSC Pharmacist, Thucuma Sise and OCSO Pharmacist Branch Chief, Ruth Ebiasah.

BHP presented an overview of the institution and the CTU structure as well as the protocols conducted by the CTU. They also presented the challenges the sites are experiencing such as frequent study monitoring visits which despite being necessary, take away resources and study protocol staff time which would otherwise have benefited the studies. BHP appealed for a well-structured way of scheduling and undertaking study monitoring visits that will not negatively impact study conduct.

"We come as a partner, this is not a monitoring visit, this is a visit from your partners to appreciate the operations and the processes of the sites and the work that is being done at the sites. We have also come to appreciate each and everyone from BHP for the great work that you have

done with the EMA inspection," said Manizhe Payton, alluding to the recent successful [European Medicines Agency \(EMA\)](#) inspection that was conducted for the [HPTN 084 Study](#).

"I convey a congratulatory message from the Director of DAIDS and your Programme Officer for a job well done with the successful EMA inspection. It is a great deal of hardwork that you have done considering that you did not have any prior experience with an EMA inspection," said Payton.

Payton noted that they also wanted to appreciate how the sites are implementing the changes necessitated by the EMA pre-inspection preparation activities. The delegation visited the BHP/HSPH Clinical Trials Unit's Gaborone and Molepolole Clinical Research Sites, the laboratory and the Gaborone site pharmacy. The team expressed happiness over the robust processes that the BHP employs in the conduct of its studies.

They praised BHP researchers for being able to work across multiple networks as well as being able to harmonize best practices across the networks. They applauded the CTU for great leadership and the good work demonstrated by the excellent processes and the quality of work at the CTU.

US Ambassador to Botswana visits BHP



US Ambassador Howard A. Van Vranken (far right) with his entourage during the lab tour

The US Ambassador to Botswana, His Excellency Ambassador Howard A. Van Vranken visited Botswana Harvard Health Partnership (BHP) on Wednesday 30th August 2023 to learn more about the [US National Institutes of Health](#) (NIH)'s partnership with BHP and to appreciate NIH funded research at BHP as well as the general BHP operations.

Ambassador Van Vranken was accompanied by Dr. Sophia Siddiqui, U.S. Health Attaché to South Africa and Southern Africa Regional Representative, Dr. Elana Clark, Acting Director, Africa Region Office, Office of Global Affairs, Dr. Mai Hijazi, Director, Office of Health Systems, Bureau for Global Health, USAID, Ms. Lisa Esapa, Acting Director, CDC Botswana Country Office and Dr. Stacie Greby, Associate Director for Science, CDC Botswana Country Office.

BHP Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Dr Gaerolwe Masheto gave an overview of the BHP while BHP Laboratory Director, Dr Sikhulile Moyo presented on

BHP Research as well as the Omicron pathogenomics. The Grants and Finance Director, Dineo Thebe apprised the ambassador and his entourage on the grant portfolio from the US, and NIH grants awarded to BHP. She revealed that the average funding from US Federal Government to BHP stands at 80% of annual budget of approximately \$10million dollars/year (NIH 54%, CDC 26%).

The funds over the years have included legacy projects such as KITSO AIDS Training Program, PEPFAR Master Trainer Program, Mmabana Study which impacted WHO's global HIV Policy on Prevention from Mother-to-Child Transmission and the Botswana Combination Prevention Project which assessed community HIV intervention strategies needed to impact attainment of [UNAIDS 95-95-95 goals](#).

Ambassador Van Vranken expressed his appreciation for the great work that BHP does in saving human lives through its impactful research that have informed global health policies.

He promised to support BHP to continue conducting cutting-edge research with impactful discoveries that will help save human life not only in Botswana but globally.

“I would like to thank you for saving humanity through the research that you do. I am not a Doctor or scientist but I am here to assure you of my support and the continued support of the US government” he said.

The Ambassador toured the [Early Infant Treatment](#) (EIT) clinic led by study physician coordinator, Dr Gbolahan Ajibola and the Clinical Trials Unit led by Dr Unoda Chakalisa, Clinical Research Site Coordinator for ACTG studies. They also toured the Botswana Harvard HIV Reference Laboratory (BHHRL) where the [SARS-CoV-2 Omicron variant](#) was first discovered, with the tour led by Laboratory Operations Manager, Terence Mohammed. The Ambassador Van Vranken commended BHP for the Omicron discovery and having the humanity to alert the world of the danger, thereby enhancing global health.

[Dr Catherine Koofhethile](#), BHP Research Scientist and Principal Investigator for Cure Research at BHP and PhD Fellow, Bonolo Phinius presented elevator pitches to the Ambassador. Dr Koofhethile’s research is on HIV cure-related research and her work involves characterizing HIV reservoirs in adolescents from Botswana who initiated treatment early in life and have been on ART for nearly two decades. She stated that the research is important for advancing HIV cure research.

Bonolo Phinius’ elevator pitch was about her PhD research work titled “Hepatitis B virus prevalence and diversity among people with HIV in rural and peri-urban communities in Botswana.”

She explained that the project is motivated by the fact that hepatitis B virus (HBV) is the leading cause of liver disease and associated deaths world-wide, noting that Botswana does not have nationally representative Hepatitis B Virus data. She clarified that this is a major hindrance to hepatitis B elimination as per the WHO aspirations.



BHP Staff with His Excellency Ambassador Howard A. Van Vranken



Catherine K. Koofhethile



Bonolo B. Phinius

BHP Receives Sequencing Machine from Africa CDC



His Excellency Dr Mokgweetsi Keabetswe Eric Masi unveiling the sequencing machine

The [Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (Africa CDC) Director General His Excellency Dr Jean Kaseya on Wednesday 30th August 2023 officially handed over a sequencing machine called Illumina NextGen2000 to Botswana Harvard Health Partnership. The NextGen2000 sequencing machine is an advanced laboratory equipment for genomic surveillance. Africa CDC is a public health agency of the African Union that supports the public health initiatives of member states and strengthen the capacity of their health institutions to deal with disease threats.

Dr Jean Kaseya pointed out that the extra ordinary machine is only the fifth in Africa and the first in Botswana. He said Africa CDC continues to respond to the health needs of Botswana and other African countries, noting that the omicron was discovered by a machine that was donated by Africa CDC.

“The world knows that on November 11, 2021, Botswana discovered Omicron but the world does not know that the omicron was discovered with a machine and reagents provided by Africa CDC. Africa CDC is supporting Botswana and today Botswana is receiving a new generation of machines called Illumina NexGen2000. This machine plus the reagents and the

other machine previously provided amounts to around P10 Million,” he said.

Receiving the gift, His Excellency Dr Mokgweetsi Keabetswe Eric Masi expressed his gratitude to Africa CDC for responding to the needs of Botswana, promising Dr Kaseya that the lab will use the machine for the good of humanity, not only Batswana but all that traverse its borders as Botswana health system does not discriminate.



Illumina NextGen2000 sequencing machine

“On behalf of Botswana Government, I would like to thank Africa CDC for this generous and appropriate gift. What must be known is that this particular facility thrives on excellence, and excellence begets things like this. I can bet you, in not so long a time, they will come up with something ingenious and ground breaking,” said President Masisi.

BHP Lab Director, Prof Sikhulile Moyo, the scientist who discovered the [Omicron](#) noted that the machine will allow Botswana to embark on a journey of discovery that will transform understanding of pathogen genomics and pave the way for a healthier, more resilient future for all. Prof Moyo said that local scientists will have an opportunity be able to discover pathogens, characterize them and provide the information that is needed for vaccine design, diagnostics, and precision medicine.



Prof Sikhulile Moyo (Left), Dr Jean Kaseya (Right).

BHP engages stakeholders on women and children research



L-R: Modiegi Diseko, Professor Roger Shapiro and Maureen Sakoi-Mosetlhi

For over 25 years, BHP has conducted clinical trials and surveillance studies to improve the lives of women and children living with HIV in Botswana. On Monday 7th August 2023, BHP held a stakeholder’s engagement meeting at AVANI Gaborone Resort and Casino to present new data from the [Tsepamo](#) and [Tatelo](#) Studies. The meeting discussed recent Tsepamo Study findings, including the final analysis and interpretation of an earlier association between dolutegravir and neural tube defects.

Tsepamo Study conducts nationwide surveillance for adverse birth outcomes and congenital abnormalities at government delivery facilities throughout Botswana, evaluating infant birth outcomes putatively linked to specific antiretroviral agents; iron, folate, and multivitamin supplementation; and COVID-19.

Tatelo Study is a cutting-edge clinical trial that has provided the first proof-of-concept that broadly neutralizing monoclonal antibodies (bNAbs) can be

used as an alternative to standard antiretroviral agents for selected children in Botswana. The Tatelo Study is also providing insights into the use of bNabs to promote functional HIV cure in children with favorable viral reservoir characteristics in future clinical trials.

The stakeholder meeting included presentations on advances in pediatric HIV treatment and cure as well as a panel discussion on the challenges and best practices for maternal-child research. The stakeholders included personnel from maternity wards from all the clinics where the studies are recruiting from nationwide, Ministry of Health officials, all Districts Health Management Teams (DHMTs), BHP collaborators and partners, community advisory board and civic society.

Meanwhile, the [Clinical Trials Unit](#) (CTU) at BHP also held a Stakeholder Engagement Meeting on 31st August 2023 at AVANI Gaborone Resort and Casino conference center involving various stakeholders in its medical research operations. The purpose of the meeting was to engage with stakeholders and share information on some of the Network Studies being conducted at BHP.

Stakeholder Engagement is important in building relationships between the researchers and the various stakeholders. This engagement also ensures that the community knows what BHP's mandate is, which research projects are being conducted and their

outcomes and how these impact on the overall public health system. The meeting was also an indication of BHP's deep appreciation of the role played by stakeholders, their perspectives in articulating the community's health needs and research priorities.



Kennedy Mupeli contributing to the discussions



BHP CTU team

Potlako+ Study empowers communities with cancer education



Mmandunyane Community at the clinic

On the 7th September 2023, [Potlako+Study](#) Team in collaboration with Nyangabgwe Referral Hospital, Greater Francistown District Health Management Team (DHMT), Mandunyane Clinic and The Fighters Support Group (cancer patients) was in Mandunyane Village educating the community on early diagnosis and treatment of various cancers.

The study team held a community cancer education day for Women at Mandunyane Clinic, educating and screening women for cervical and breast cancer. In the evening, of the same day, the team moved to Mandunyane Kgotla to educate and screen men for penile, prostate and anal cancer.

The people were educated about what they should do to guard against cancers and the importance of regular screening and presenting early for medical care and treatment.

Cancer survivors also shared their experiences with the community about cancer “warning signs” and their journey to recovery from different cancers, encouraging the community to empower themselves with knowledge on cancer screening.



Dr. Ntloedibe addressing men at Mmandunyane Kgotla

On the 11th of September 2023, the study team then moved to Nata for a Workers Wellness Day they had organized for the working community in Nata Village. The event which was held at Nata Primary Sports Ground also focused on cervical and breast cancer screening and evaluation of symptomatic participants for vulva, vaginal, head and neck, penile, prostate and anal cancers. Other services offered included Oral Health and Dental checks.

Apart from cancer screening, the event also featured other wellness activities that included a morning walk, tug of war, athletics, cards and chess games as well as a five-aside football match. The Wellness Day was conducted under the theme: **“Nata Workers Wellness Day, Know Your Body, Act Fast”**

This event was held in conjunction with Nata Clinic, Nyangabgwe Referral Hospital, Tutume Health District Health Management Team (DHMT) and other government departments, state owned enterprises and the private sector.



Tug of war at Nata Workers Wellness Day

Human Resources updates

BHP New employees as of June 2023.



Salang Moutswi
Research Assistant
(Lab)



Aratwa Tumagole
Research Assistant
(Lab)



Lesitamang Bafana
Research Assistant
(BSHRI)



Tashinga Magaya
Research Assistant
(Tshireletso/Doris Duke)



Pabalelo Mannatu
Cleaner (Admin)



Olorato Mokime
Research Assistant
(HPV)



Kudzanayi Kunje
Study Physician
(CTU)



Kedumetse Seru
Laboratory Scientist
Projects Assistant (Lab)



Samuel Kabelo
Systems Analyst
(DMC)



Patience Motshosi
Laboratory Scientist 1
(Lab)



Kesegofetse Chabaesele
Internal Medicine
Site Director (BIDMC)



Irene Kitsi
Research Assistant
(FACET)



Leah Kanaimba
Pharmacist
(Pharmacy)



Precious Mpondi
Research Nurse
(Tshireletso/Doris Duke)



Khumoyame Maotonyane
Research Assistant
(Tshireletso/Doris)



Kabuba Kachere
Research Assistant
(Tshireletso/Doris) Duke)



Bonolo Molefe
Laboratory Scientist
(Lab)

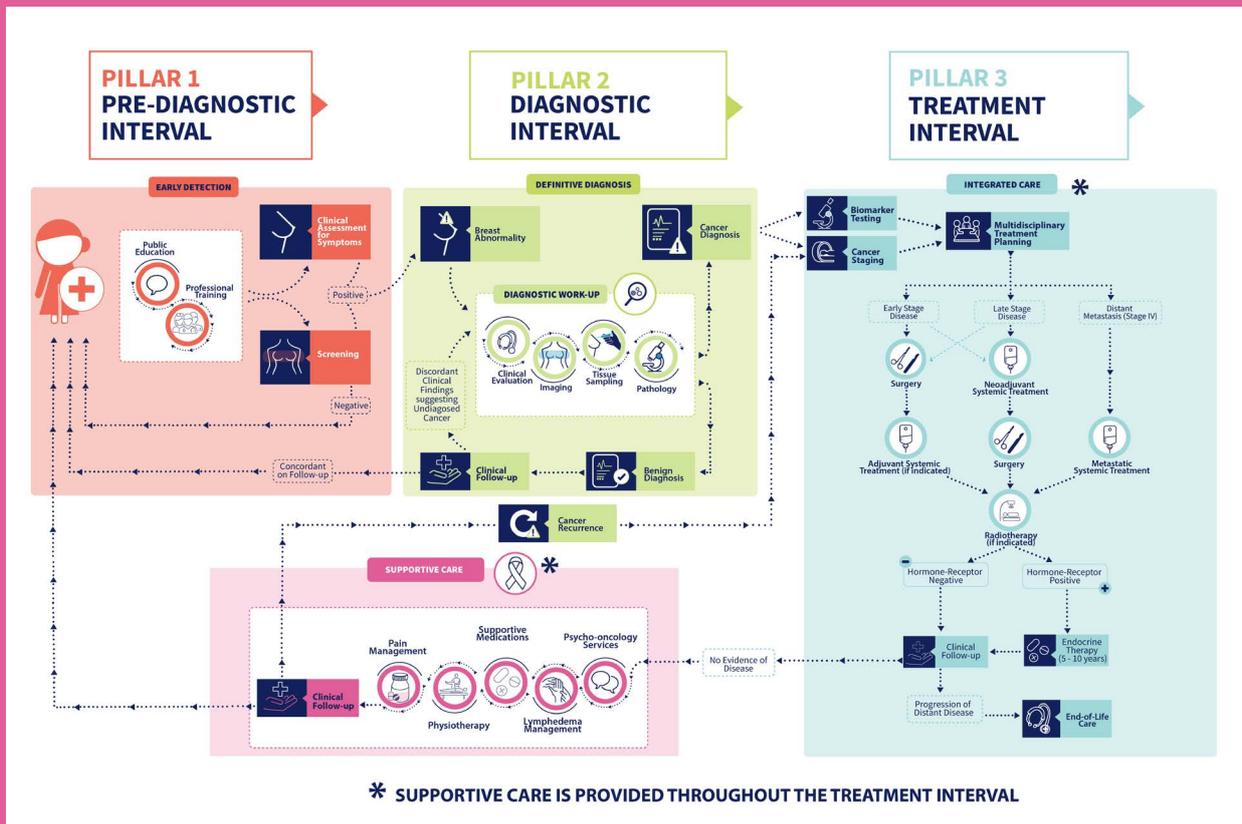


Khumo Mompoti
Accounts Assistant
(Finance)



Calvin Mongwaketsi
Pharmacy Technician
(Pharmacy)

The Global Breast Cancer Initiative: patient pathway



VISION

To Be a World-Renowned Public Health Institute.

MISSION

To Fight HIV/AIDS and Emerging Public Health Challenges Through Innovative Research, Education, and Capacity Building That Impacts Policy and Practice.

CORE VALUES

BENEFICENCE

INNOVATION

COLLABORATION

EXCELLENCE

BOTHO

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