

French Ambassador to Botswana Visits BHP



Soukeyna Fall, Thomas Mourez, His Excellency French Ambassador to Botswana, Olivier Brochenin and Charlote Siorat during their recent visit to BHP.

The French Ambassador to Botswana, H.E. Ambassador Olivier Brochenin, paid an official visit to the Botswana Harvard Health Partnership (BHP) on the 16th April 2024 to appreciate BHP's groundbreaking health research programs and to tour its laboratory facilities. The visit underscores the growing international interest in BHP's innovative contributions to public health.

The Ambassador was accompanied by his Health Advisor,

Thomas Mourez and two attachés, Soukeyna Fall and Charlotte Siorat. The Ambassador and his entourage were warmly welcomed by Dr Joseph Makhema, the Chief Executive Officer of BHP, along with members of the Executive Management team. The visit began with an in-depth briefing on BHP's mission, ongoing projects, and significant achievements.

The meeting discussed various topics around health and the possibility of potential collaborations

between BHP and French research institutions, focusing on areas such as HIV/AIDS research, capacity building, and knowledge exchange. Special emphasis was placed on the partnership's collaborative efforts with local and international institutions to combat HIV/AIDS and other emerging health challenges in Botswana and globally.

During the briefing, Dr Gaerolwe Masheto, BHP's Deputy Chief Executive Officer highlighted several key initiatives, Principal Investigator

initiated studies and Network Clinical trials across different research areas and other pivotal research projects.

Following the briefing, the Ambassador was given a guided tour of BHP's laboratory facilities, and wanted especially to see the area where the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 was discovered. The tour showcased the advanced laboratory equipment, technologies and cutting-edge research methodologies employed by the institution.



The Ambassadors team during the Lab tour

BHP Management Conducts Staff Engagement Meetings



BHP Deputy C.E.O Dr. Gaerolwe Masheto engaging with staff at one of the staff engagement meetings.

The Botswana Harvard Health Partnership (BHP) Executive management held a series of staff engagement meetings between April and June 2024 aimed at sharing the current state of the organization and providing feedback on previous issues raised by staff. These meetings are part of BHP's ongoing commitment to fostering a transparent, inclusive, and responsive organizational culture.

Led by the Chief Executive Officer, Dr Joseph Makhema, the team comprised of Dr Gaerolwe Masheto, Deputy CEO, Mr Cornelius Gaetsaloe Chief Operations Officer (COO), and Mrs Beauty Malumbela, Head of Human Resources, Communications and Strategy. The engagement meetings provided a platform for open communication between management and staff. The sessions began with a comprehensive state of the

organization address, in which the CEO detailed the achievements, ongoing projects, financial status of the institution, challenges and strategic goals for the future. The CEO further highlighted BHP's progress in research across different research themes, capacity-building initiatives, and collaborative efforts with local and international partners.

"Our achievements are a direct result of the dedication and hard work of our entire team. It is essential that we continue to work together, share ideas, and address any challenges that arise. These meetings are a critical part of ensuring that every team member's voice is heard and valued," said, Dr Makhema, emphasized the importance of staff contributions to the organization's success.

Following the address, management provided feedback on issues previously raised by staff, demonstrating the organization's commitment to continuous improvement and responsiveness. Key topics included staff medical insurance, improving employment contracts, and providing additional professional development opportunities for support staff.

Staff members expressed their appreciation for the engagement meetings, noting the positive impact of having a forum to voice their concerns and suggestions. They stated that it is encouraging to see that their feedback is taken seriously and that necessary steps are being taken to address staff concerns. They noted that the engagement meetings made them feel more connected and valued as part of the BHP team.

Beauty Malumbela, Head of Human Resources, Communications and Strategy reiterated the importance of these engagement sessions as part of BHP's strategy for maintaining a supportive and collaborative work environment. "Our goal as HR is to ensure that every team member feels heard and valued. We are committed to creating a workplace where everyone can thrive and contribute to our mission of advancing public health research initiatives," she said.

The engagement meetings covered all departments and studies within BHP, including sites outside Gaborone. The meetings will continue to be a regular feature in BHP, fostering an ongoing dialogue between staff and management. This proactive approach ensures that the institution remains a dynamic and inclusive organisation.

Moso Study Trains Midwives on Point-of-Care HIV Testing and Early Dolutegravir Use for Infants



Trainees observing a lab testing procedure & how samples are analyzed.

Consistent with the BHP capacity building mission and to demonstrate the importance of training healthcare providers and integrating advanced medical practices into everyday clinical settings. The [Moso Study](#) trained a total of 62 midwives and maternity ward nurses representing several healthcare facilities in Botswana on point-of-care HIV testing techniques. The training took place on the 9-10th and 16-17th April 2024 in Gaborone and Francistown respectively.

Led by early career Investigator, Dr Gbolahan Ajibola, The Moso Study explores the feasibility of implementing facility based targeted birth Point of Care HIV testing among high risk neonates and early administration of Dolutegravir based antiretroviral therapy in HIV positive children.

Of the 62 participants, 29 were from the Greater Gaborone District Health Management Team (DHMT)

while 33 were from the Greater Francistown DHMT), specifically from areas where the study is taking place. The training initiative equips nurses with the necessary skills to perform HIV tests on newborns and to administer the first dose of Dolutegravir based ART promptly, thus enhancing early detection and treatment of HIV in newborns.

Moso Study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of early HIV testing and the immediate administration of Dolutegravir based ART to infants born to HIV-positive mothers. The study emphasizes the critical importance of early diagnosis and treatment in preventing acquisition of HIV in infants born to mothers living with HIV. The training sessions included both theoretical and practical demonstrations, ensuring that nurses are well-prepared to implement the procedures.

“Early detection and treatment of HIV in infants are crucial in reducing the acquired HIV rates and improving the long-term health of these children. By empowering maternity ward nurses with the skills and knowledge to conduct point-of-care HIV testing and administer Dolutegravir based ART , we are taking a vital step towards eliminating acquisition of HIV in infants born to mothers living with HIV.” said Dr. Gbolahan Ajibola, Principal Investigator of Moso Study, highlighting the significance of this training initiative.

Nurses participating in the training expressed their appreciation for the initiative, noting that the training will not only enhance their skills but also give them the confidence to perform the tests and administer treatment correctly,thereby ensuring prompt care for HIV-exposed infants.

Dr Ajibola emphasized the broader implications of the project,emphasizing that the training is also expected to have a broader impact on the healthcare system by integrating point-of-care HIV testing into routine neonatal care. This approach ensures that HIV testing becomes a standard procedure in maternity wards, facilitating early diagnosis, and treatment, he explained.

Moso Study continues to support the implementation of point-of-care HIV testing and early Dolutegravir based ART administration, with the goal of scaling up these practices based on the positive outcomes observed. Collaborative efforts between researchers, healthcare professionals, and institutions are essential to impact and close the gaps in the fight against HIV/AIDS, starting with newborn infants, as the country strives towards full HIV/AIDS epidemic control.



BHP safety officer, Charity Ralegoreng conducting safety training.



Point of care training attendees listening attentively



BHP Regulatory Manager, Tumulano Sekoto (Left) handing over a certificate of participation to one of the trainees.

Catherine Koofhethile Appointed Adjunct Professor at the University of Venda



Professor Catherine K. Koofhethile

In a significant recognition of her contributions to HIV cure research, Catherine Koofhethile, the Principal Investigator for “The [Phodiso Study](#),” has been appointed as an adjunct Professor in the Directorate of Research and Innovation at the [University of Venda](#) (UNIVEN) in South Africa effective January 2024.

The Phodiso Study enrolls adolescents aged 10 years and above from Botswana who acquired HIV during pregnancy and breast feeding and were initiated on antiretroviral therapy (ART) within the first two years of life becoming virally suppressed for more than 10 years. The objectives are to identify potential markers of functional cure among these adolescents with a view to advancing HIV cure research.

Prof Koofhethile’s responsibilities at UNIVEN entail postgraduate student supervision at Honours, Masters

and Doctoral level as well as collaborative research initiatives with the aim of enhancing the research profile and output of the Research and Innovation Directorate. She will be offering seminars or guest lectures on campus and participate in workshops or in evaluation panels in the faculty.

Her appointment as an adjunct Professor at the University of Venda is expected to strengthen ties between the university and Botswana Harvard Health Partnership, fostering a greater exchange of knowledge and research initiatives.

This appointment marks a significant milestone in the career of Prof. Koofhethile and serves as an inspiring example of how cross-institutional collaboration can drive progress in critical areas of health research.

BHP equips managers with leadership skills



One of the leadership training sessions.

The Botswana Harvard Health Partnership (BHP) facilitated a series of training sessions aimed at enhancing the leadership and management skills of its personnel. A total of 46 managers comprising 19 supervisors, and 27 middle and senior managers were divided into two groups for comprehensive management and leadership training sessions. Supervisors were trained on 28 May 2024 at Protea Hotel while middle and senior managers were trained on May 30-31 and 6-7th June 2024 at the Botswana Institute of Banking and Finance (BIBF) premises located in the

Central Business District (CBD). Both training sessions were conducted by BIBF. All who participated in this initiative were awarded certificates of attendance upon completing their respective courses. The training sessions are a demonstration of BHP's commitment to continuous learning and improvement, which is what enables the organisation to deliver high-quality health research and services. The training also underscores BHP's commitment to professional development and organizational excellence.



Lab Manager Terence Mohammed (left) & IMPAACT Network Studies Coordinator Mpho Raesi (right) at the training.



BIBF leadership skills training facilitator.

BHP Conducts Staff Refresher Training on Policies and Procedures



BHP Finance Manager Mr. Ronald Ruele.

In a continued effort to enhance operational efficiency and ensure compliance with organizational standards, the Botswana Harvard Health Partnership (BHP) on May 14, 2024 conducted a comprehensive staff refresher training on policies and procedures. The training focused on key areas within the Human Resources, Grants, Finance, and Procurement departments.

The refresher training reinforces BHP's dedication to fostering a well-informed, competent, and compliant workforce. The training sessions were designed to update staff on the latest protocols, reinforce best practices, and address any gaps in understanding or implementation of organizational policies. This initiative is part of organization's commitment to maintaining high standards of governance and operational excellence.

The HR training covered areas such as employment contracts and their renewal process, leave management processing on the Employee Self Service (ESS) electronic system. Emphasis was placed on fostering a positive

workplace culture, highlighting how HR is supporting different studies and departments.

The Grants Department presented on the overall role of the department and applicable grant procedures and policies. The session also highlighted the importance of filling Purchase Requisition Forms (PRF) which has to be submitted to Grants Office for approval before any purchase order can be processed for the procurement of goods and services. This is to ensure availability and appropriate allocation of funds.

The Finance Department training addressed financial policy issues. Staff were trained on maintaining accurate financial records, implementing internal controls, and understanding the financial implications of operational decisions. The goal was to enhance financial oversight and ensure fiscal responsibility across the organization.

The procurement training focused on procurement policies, supplier management, and adherence to procurement ethics. The trainers covered the importance of competitive bidding, maintaining transparency in procurement processes, and ensuring the efficient and cost-effective acquisition of goods and services.

Addressing staff at the training, BHP Finance Manager, Ronald Ruele noted that "Regular refresher training is essential to ensure that all staff are up-to-date with our policies and procedures. This not only helps in maintaining compliance but also enhances staff's operational efficiency and effectiveness."

Training sessions were interactive, allowing staff members to discuss and fully engage with the trainers. Staff appreciated the refresher training, as it provided clarity on various policies and procedures that need to be followed.

BHP plans to conduct regular refresher training sessions to continually update staff on any changes in policies and procedures in an effort to ensure that all team members are well-equipped to support the organization's mandate across their respective departments with excellence and integrity.

BHP Hosts TESA Clinical Research Associates Training on Clinical Trials Monitoring

The Botswana Harvard Health Partnership (BHP) hosted a hands-on Clinical Research Associate (CRA) placement training of six trainees from the [Trials of Excellence in Southern Africa](#) (TESA III) sites as part of the training in Clinical Trials Monitoring. This practical training conducted from 13-17 May 2024, was aimed at bridging the gap between theoretical concepts and real-world application in the monitoring of clinical trials. The training was led by Miriam Nikito from Uganda.

The trainees were BHP's Regulatory Coordinator, Ngozana Seonyatseng and Pharmacy Manager, Tshepo T. Frank, Agness Faria Nhidza and Ashley N. Chizema from Biomedical Research & Training Institute (BRTI) in Zimbabwe Zimbabwe, and Valdemiro Novela and Vasco Sambo from [Centro de Investigação em Saúde de Manhiça](#) (CISM) in Mozambique.

Participants were randomly divided into three groups of two and assigned various studies conducted at BHP, working alongside principal investigators and study teams to monitor clinical trials. This experience highlighted the critical processes and importance of effective monitoring in clinical trials.

The five-day training included desk review of ethics and regulatory compliance, focusing on the Investigator

Site File (ISF). Trainees reconciled the ISF with the Trial Master File (TMF) using an ISF monitoring tool. This activities were conducted in the first day of the training.

On the second day, activities included the review of informed consent forms (ICFs), including understanding assessment, screen failures, and withdrawals against the ICF tracker, screening, and enrollment logs. Teams performed source data verification, safety tracking and reporting, and followed participants through the pharmacy and the laboratory.

Day three was for facility tour, which included a visit to the pharmacy to review the pharmacy file, IP shipment documentation, storage temperature measures, dispensing procedures, and equipment calibration. In the laboratory, trainees followed samples from reception to storage, verifying the chain of custody and linking samples to participant consent preferences.

On the fourth day, trainees compiled monitoring reports and had one-on-one discussions with the trainer. On the last day, trainees wrote an examination followed by a debriefing. The training comprised daily debriefs where groups presented their findings. The training concluded with a certification event and closing remarks from Laboratory Director, Prof. Sikhulile Moyo.



The training comprised of daily debriefing and discussion of findings

BHP & TESA host Stakeholder Community Engagement on Clinical Trials



TESA stakeholder engagement attendees.

The Botswana Harvard Health Partnership (BHP) and [Trials of Excellence in Southern Africa](#) (TESA) held a stakeholder and community engagement meeting on March 19, 2024, at Cresta President Hotel to foster robust dialogue between researchers, research regulators, community representatives and study participants.

The meeting objectives were;

1. To facilitate dialogue and appreciate stakeholder and community perspectives on clinical trials
2. Share and exchange insights on ongoing and past clinical trials,
3. Identify successful, best practices and deficiencies or areas for improvement and,
4. To learn from and appreciate clinical trial participants' shared experiences aimed at fostering a deeper understanding of the clinical trial process.
5. To emphasize the importance of conducting relevant, ethical and impactful health research,

The meeting brought together different stakeholders invested in advancing health research in Botswana. Attendees included researchers, health policy implementers, regulatory authorities, ethics review committees' members, community advisory board

members, community members, Non-Governmental Organisations, and current or previous clinical trials participants.

The meeting featured presentations from different organisations and testimonials from individual study participants who shared their experiences of being involved in clinical trials. Attendees engaged in interactive discussions on a range of topics including ethical considerations of health research, regulatory oversight of clinical trials, protection of participants, diversity and inclusion as well as strategies for promoting community involvement in the discourse and conduct of health research, and in healthcare decision-making processes in general.

When presenting the BHP overview and synopsis of some of the BHP clinical trials, Dr. Gaerolwe Masheto, the BHP Deputy Chief Executive Officer, emphasized the importance of community engagement in shaping health policies and interventions tailored to meet the specific needs of the community, which policies in turn should be anchored on health research and evidence based decision making processes.

"The success of our research relies on active

participation and input from the communities and today’s engagement provides a platform for meaningful dialogue and collaboration, which will ultimately lead to more impactful health research and policies,” he said.

TESA Coordinator at BHP, Tuelo Mogashoa, underscored the importance of building trust between all stakeholders involved in research. She highlighted that one of TESA’s objectives led by BHP, is to encourage, promote networking and dialogue between researchers, communities and policy makers to maximise the impact of clinical research in Africa.

Participants applauded the collaborative approach adopted by the BHP and TESA Consortium, emphasizing the need for continued engagement and partnership to address healthcare challenges.



Tuelo Mogashoa, BHP TESA coordinator

Human Resources updates

New employees effective April 2024.



Kabelo Matsagopane
Procurement Manager
(Procurement & Supplies)



Tshepiso Lekang
Pharmacy Technician
(Pharmacy)



Caroline Makunike
Research Nurse
(CTU)

New promotions effective April 2024.



Gape Gobuiwang
HR Assistant
(HR)



Masego Phatedi
Grants Assistant
(Grants)



Nimrod Munatsi
Systems Analyst
Developer (DMC)



Neo Zambe
Senior Admin Assistant
(BSRHI)



Shally Morgan
Senior Research Assistant
(Tshireletso)



Karen Shambira
Study Physician Coordinator
(BSRHI)

Selected BHP Publications

1. Hepatitis B Virus Prevalence among HIV-Uninfected People Living in Rural and Peri-Urban Areas in Botswana. Anderson M, Mangogola T, Phinius BB, Mpebe G, Aimakhu CO, Choga WT, Phakedi B, Bhebhe LN, Ditshwanelo D, Baruti K, Mpofu-Dobo L, Othusitse L, Ratsoma T, Gaolathe T, Makhema J, Shapiro R, Lockman S, Moyo S, Gaseitsiwe S. *Microorganisms*. 2024 Jun 15;12(6):1207. doi: 10.3390/microorganisms12061207. PMID: 38930589
2. High prevalence of albuminuria among adult males living with HIV in Botswana. Mosepele M, Ponatshego P, Molebatsi K, Williams C, Mokgathe L, Lockman S, Youssouf N, Gross R, Jarvis J, Wang D, Jaffar S. *Sci Rep*. 2024 Jun 23;14(1):14432. doi: 10.1038/s41598-024-65099-w. PMID: 38910157
3. A mixed methods approach identifying facilitators and barriers to guide adaptations to InterCARE strategies: an integrated HIV and hypertension care model in Botswana. Gala P, Ponatshego P, Bogart LM, Youssouf N, Ramotsababa M, Van Pelt AE, Moshomo T, Dintwa E, Seipone K, Ilias M, Tonwe V, Gaolathe T, Hirschhorn LR, Mosepele M. *Implement Sci Commun*. 2024 Jun 20;5(1):67. doi: 10.1186/s43058-024-00603-x. PMID: 38902846
4. Improving management of first and second stages of labour in low- and middle-income countries. Hofmeyr GJ, Moreri-Ntshabele B, Qureshi Z, Memo N, Hanson S, Muller E, Singata-Madliki M. *Best Pract Res Clin Obstet Gynaecol*. 2024 Jun 14:102517. doi: 10.1016/j.bpobgyn.2024.102517. Online ahead of print. PMID: 38902106
5. Dolutegravir- Versus Efavirenz-Based Treatment in Pregnancy: Impact on Red Blood Cell Folate Concentrations in Pregnant Women and Their Infants. Jacobson DL, Crider KS, DeMarrais P, Brummel S, Zhang M, Pfeiffer CM, Moore CA, McCarthy K, Johnston B, Mohammed T, Vhembo T, Kabughho E, Muzorah GA, Cassim H, Fairlie L, Machado ES, Ngocho JS, Shapiro RL, Serghides L, Chakhtoura N, Chinula L, Lockman S. *J Infect Dis*. 2024 Jun 15;jiae308. doi: 10.1093/infdis/jiae308. Online ahead of print. PMID: 38877762
6. The Impact of COVID-19 on the HIV Cascade of Care in Botswana - An Interrupted Time Series. Sehurutshi A, Farooqui H, Chivese T. *AIDS Behav*. 2024 Jun 10. doi: 10.1007/s10461-024-04388-x. Online ahead of print. PMID: 38856847
7. Integrated management of cryptococcal meningitis and concurrent opportunistic infections to improve outcomes in advanced HIV disease: a randomised strategy trial. Ellis J, Nsangi L, Bangdiwala A, Hale G, Gakuru J, Kagimu E, Mugabi T, Kigozi E, Tukundane A, Okirwoth M, Kandole TK, Cresswel F, Harrison TS, Moore D, Fielding K, Meya D, Boulware D, Jarvis JN. *Wellcome Open Res*. 2024 Jun 5;9:14. doi: 10.12688/wellcomeopenres.19324.2. eCollection 2024. PMID: 38854693
8. Persistence and risk factors of occult hepatitis B virus infections among antiretroviral therapy-naive people living with HIV in Botswana. Anderson M, Phinius BB, Phakedi BK, Mudanga M, Bhebhe LN, Tlhabano GN, Motshosi P, Ratsoma T, Baruti K, Mpebe G, Choga WT, Marlink R, Glebe D, Blackard JT, Moyo S, Kramvis A, Gaseitsiwe S. *Front Microbiol*. 2024 May 9;15:1342862. doi: 10.3389/fmicb.2024.1342862. eCollection 2024. PMID: 38784816

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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