

## German Research Foundation Explores Collaboration Opportunities with BHP



BHP CEO Dr Joseph Makhema receiving a DFG branded umbrella from DFG President Dr Katja Becker

The [German Research Foundation](#) (DFG), a research funding organization in Germany, visited the Botswana Harvard Partnership (BHP) on November 12, 2024, as part of its initiative to strengthen partnerships with African institutions. The visit aimed to identify potential collaborations and promote equitable, long-term research partnerships.

During the visit, BHP presented an overview of its extensive research portfolio, showcasing its mandate and research scope to help DFG appreciate its contributions to global health and science. The presentation provided insight into BHP's diverse work in areas such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, maternal and child health, genomic research, and laboratory work, highlighting its role as a key research institution in

the region.

DFG President, Dr Katja Becker, praised BHP's efforts and emphasized the foundation's commitment to supporting excellent research. "DFG funds excellent research, and the criteria is excellence research. We are here to explore potential collaboration opportunities and establish equal and fair partnerships for research funding," she said.



Dr Becker also stressed the importance of fostering strong links between the German research community and African researchers. She encouraged BHP investigators to collaborate with German counterparts, noting that joint funding applications could significantly enhance research opportunities.

The discussions focused on strengthening research funding systems to support joint projects and facilitate networking between German and African researchers. Dr Becker highlighted the need for partnerships that are mutually beneficial, allowing researchers to learn from each other and advance science together.

The DFG delegation expressed enthusiasm for BHP's existing collaborations with German investigators

and institutions. Dr Marcus Wilms, Program Director for International Affairs – Africa and the Middle East, encouraged BHP to build on these relationships and forge new connections.

“Collaboration helps link your work with centers of excellence in Germany, showcasing your research and discovering how others can collaborate with you,” Dr. Wilms noted.

The visit underscored DFG’s commitment to promoting regional networking among African research systems and sharing ideas with global partners to advance science in sub-Saharan Africa. It also highlighted BHP’s pivotal role as a research leader in the region and its potential to contribute to impactful global partnerships.



DFG delegation touring the lab with Prof Sikhulie Moyo



Tuelo Mogashoa with the DFG Team



Group photo of the DFG and BHP team



# SHARE-CM Workshop Highlights Importance of CM Education



Group photo of the SHARE-CM Workshop attendees

The SHARE-CM Workshop held on 16 November 2024 at Oasis Motel, brought together community health workers (CHWs), patients, and advocates to discuss advancements in the fight against Cryptococcal Meningitis (CM). With a focus on education, community engagement, and patient care, the event emphasized the critical role of CHWs in improving health outcomes.



Workshop Facilitator, Dr Tshepo Leeme

SHARE-CM is a five-year non-research grant funded by the [CDC](#) to facilitate implementation of the short course regimen for treating HIV-associated cryptococcal meningitis. Building on the success of the AMBITION-cm phase III study that was conducted by BHP, the project aims to reduce CM-related mortality by leveraging individual and institutional experience in delivering the AMBITION-cm short-course regimens to facilitate widespread implementation across Botswana.

The workshop was facilitated by Dr. Tshepo Leeme, the Project Coordinator who presented comprehensive insights into Cryptococcal Meningitis, highlighting the importance of early diagnosis and adherence to treatment. "Cryptococcal Meningitis is a serious condition, but with the right tools and community education, we can help save lives," said Dr. Leeme. The Director of [Centre for Youth of Hope \(CEYOHO\)](#) who is leading the project's community engagements efforts, Mr Kennedy Mupeli followed with a presentation on community outreach and education. He emphasized that education empowers communities to recognize symptoms early, seek treatment promptly, and support one another.

The workshop drew a diverse audience, including CHWs from various organizations and CM patients who shared their personal journeys. Their testimonies underscored the challenges of living with CM and the importance of lumbar puncture as part of the CM treatment.

CHWs are key players in delivering community-based health services, guiding individuals toward healthier behaviours. The SHARE-CM project has developed literacy materials such as posters, pamphlets, flyers, and an educational video on lumbar punctures and patient testimonials. The study has also trained CHWs and healthcare workers to improve their knowledge of CM and its management.

Workshop discussions also focused on strengthening community understanding of CM through outreach programs to raise awareness about symptoms and prevention, equipping patients and caregivers with treatment literacy materials, and utilizing patient testimonies to promote health-seeking behaviours and reduce stigma.

Participants expressed gratitude for the workshop. "This workshop has equipped us with the knowledge to better understand the disease and how best to share knowledge with our communities," said one CHW attendee.



Attendees paying attention to the presentations



Delegates from Sentebale



Delegates from Positive Moments



# IMPAACT 2042 “Tatelo Plus” Study Begins Participant Enrollment

The IMPAACT 2042 study, known as Tatelo Plus, has begun enrolling participants in Botswana. This Phase I/II clinical trial aims to advance pediatric HIV treatment and cure research by exploring the use of broadly neutralizing antibodies (bNABs) and analytic treatment interruption (ATI) to assess their effects on HIV viral reservoirs, immune function, and the maintenance of viral suppression in early-treated children. Tatelo Plus study evaluates the impact of bNABs and ATI on HIV viral reservoirs, immune function, and the ability to maintain viral suppression without antiretroviral therapy (ART).

The study led by Dr Roger Shapiro and Dr Gbolahan Ajibola in collaboration with the [International Maternal Pediatric Adolescent AIDS Clinical Trials](#) (IMPAACT) Network is being conducted at two Botswana Harvard Health Partnership (BHP) Clinical Research Sites (CRS). The Francistown CRS enrolled its first participant on November 11, 2024, followed by the Gaborone CRS the next day. To date, the study has enrolled 12 participants across both sites.

The study is recruiting children and young adults aged 24 weeks to 25 years who are living with HIV-1, on suppressive antiretroviral therapy (ART), and drawn from existing cohorts within BHP.

Tatelo Plus consists of four sequential steps. In **Step 1**, Participants continue ART with the addition of 3 bNABs; in **Step 2**, ART is discontinued, while triple bNAB treatment continues for up to 24 or 48 weeks. In **Step 3**, some participants transition to ATI, stopping both ART and bNABs under close monitoring. In **Step 4**, all participants resume ART.

The study’s design allows for careful evaluation of immune responses and maintenance of viral suppression. Children aged 24 weeks to 12 years will participate in Steps 1 and 2, while older participants, up to 25 years of age, will be included in ATI/Step 3.

Dr. Gbolahan Ajibola, the study’s Principal Investigator, emphasized its significance, stating, “Tatelo Plus study represents a critical step toward innovative HIV treatment approaches, with the potential to improve long-term outcomes for children living with HIV and identification of favourable characteristics that could lead to achieving a “functional cure”.

Dr Ajibola says that testing alternative therapies could reduce reliance on lifelong ART, noting that Tatelo Plus could transform pediatric HIV care and offer new hope for children and families affected by HIV.



# IMPAACT

International Maternal Pediatric Adolescent  
AIDS Clinical Trials Network

# Viral Hepatitis Team Hosts First Retreat to Celebrate Achievements



BHP Viral Hepatitis Team

On November 12, 2024, the Botswana Harvard Health Partnership (BHP) Viral Hepatitis team held its inaugural retreat at Lion Park Resort, marking a day of celebration, team-building, and reflection on a year of successes. The event brought together 24 members from the laboratory and clinical teams, including Research Associate, Dr Motswedi Anderson, who is one of the team's founding members.

The retreat highlighted significant milestones achieved by the team in 2024, such as the graduation of two PhD candidates, Dr Bonolo Phinius and Dr Kabo Baruti, progress on a new study, and the addition of four newly registered MPhil students namely Tsholofelo Ratsoma, Gorata Mpebe, Patience Motshosi and Basetsana Phakedi and a PhD student, Linda Mpofu-Dobo. The team also collectively published seven papers this year. The gathering served as a platform to appreciate these accomplishments while strengthening team cohesion.

In this event the Team reflected on how far the team have come and reflected on the progress of the team members. They appreciated that the Viral Hepatitis team

started at grass roots levels and that the first batches of members have progressed quite impressively. The first member to be supervised by Dr Anderson was Dr Wonderful Choga in 2014 where he was doing his undergraduate project and Dr Anderson had just started her MPhil months before in 2013. He grew with the group up to now where he now has a PhD.

Dr Bonolo Phinius joined as an intern and now also have a PhD. Dr Bonolo Phinius have been handling on the ground supervision of the group since 2022 when Dr Anderson moved to South Africa for her Postdoc training. Dr Phinius had just started her PhD studies when she took over and she has done well with the new team members who at that time were doing their undergraduate projects or were interns. Dr Tshepiso Mbangiwa was with the Team for her undergraduate project and for her MPhil and now also got a PhD in a different field. Lynnette Bhebhe joined for her undergraduate project and won the prestigious Wellcome Grant which sponsored her MSc.

Activities throughout the day were designed to enhance

interpersonal skills like communication, trust, and social connection, which are vital for a positive workplace environment. Participants were divided into two teams, "Zebra" and "Lion," and engaged in creative tasks such as designing victory chants and mottos. Games like the balloon caterpillar race, tug-of-war, and ball-and-spoon race fostered healthy competition, with Team Zebra emerging victorious after winning three out of five games.

Team members shared valuable takeaways from the retreat. Patience Motshosi remarked, "I have learned a lot about teamwork skills and the importance of listening because everyone is working towards a common goal." Thato Phenyio reflected, "I am grateful for the interaction that allowed immense networking. Beyond being results-oriented, it is crucial to understand each other socially and emotionally to achieve the best outcomes." Florence Gaongalelwe added, "Thanks to the HBV team, I have realized that BHP is not just a workplace focused

on results but also a family where everyone feels welcome."

The Team Leader, Dr Motswedi Anderson has noted that the retreat was a reminder that while the team continues to pursue excellence in research, they are equally committed to creating a supportive and collaborative environment to reinforce bonds and a sense of belonging. She noted that she wouldn't be able to do that without the great supervision she received and continues to receive from Drs Simani Gaseitsiwe as the main supervisor, Dr Rosemary Musonda and Prof Sikhulile Moyo.

This successful event was organized by some of the viral hepatitis team members namely, Lynnette Bhebhe, Patience Motshosi, Tsholofelo Ratsoma, Gorata Mpebe, Chanana Tsayang and Lindiwe Ndlangamandla. The team is appreciated for all their efforts in planning for the retreat.

## CAB Member Mathogonolo "Max" Mabaka Passes Away



RIP: Max Mabaka

The Botswana Harvard Partnership (BHP) and the broader advocacy community are mourning the untimely passing of Mathogonolo "Max" Mabaka, who died unexpectedly on Tuesday, November 12, 2024 and was laid to rest on November 17, 2024. A prominent voice for transgender and intersex rights in Botswana, Max served as the Project Coordinator for the [Rainbow Identity Association](#) (RIA) and a valued member of the BHP Community Advisory Board (CAB) representing RIA and the broader transgender and intersex community.

Max was renowned for his unwavering dedication to advocating for equality and acceptance of transgender and intersex persons. His work extended far beyond his role, as he used platforms like the BHP Journal Club meetings to champion inclusion and challenge societal norms. At his memorial service, colleagues and collaborators consistently described his work as impactful and transformative, leaving an enduring mark on those who had the privilege of engaging with his ideas.

The announcement of Max's passing was shared by RIA Director Skipper Mogapi, who expressed profound grief at the loss. "We will all miss him more than words can



express,” Mogapi said, adding that Max was more than a coworker but also a friend and a source of inspiration. Mogapi reassured the BHP community that RIA would honour Max’s legacy by continuing its partnership with BHP and advocacy work in his memory.

BHP Community Engagement Coordinator, Ernest Moseki, also reflected on Max’s legacy: “Max was a passionate advocate and his unwavering dedication to creating a more inclusive world has left a lasting legacy, and his absence will be profoundly felt by all of us.”

“The BHP extends its deepest condolences to Max’s

family, friends, and colleagues at RIA during this time of loss. May his remarkable life and work continue to inspire and guide the fight for justice, equality and inclusivity,” said Moseki.

Speaking at the memorial service, Reverend Mampane offered heartfelt condolences to Max’s family and friends. He highlighted Max’s profound contributions to human rights advocacy and the powerful impact of sharing his personal journey of transformation. Reverend Mampane noted that, although Max’s passing leaves a deep void, his legacy will continue to inspire efforts toward equality and dignity for all.

## Congratulations, Dr. OT Choga



Dr Ontlametse Choga posing for photo with her supervisors afeter a successful PhD thesis defense

Dr. Ontlametse Thato Choga successfully defended her PhD in Medical Sciences at the [University of Botswana](#) on Friday. Her thesis is titled **“HIV Drug Resistance Mutations and Virologic Failure in the Context of Low-Level Viremia During Antiretroviral Therapy in Botswana.”**

Dr Otlametse Choga have six PhD-related publications and 20 overall. She was supervised by Dr. Simani Gaseitsiwe, Prof. Sikhulile Moyo, Dr. Modisa Motswaledi (UB), and Dr. Irene Gobe(UB). Special thanks to Fogarty and TESA for funding support.



# Human Resources updates

Welcoming New and Promoted Employees effective November 2024.



**Dipuo Ikhutseng**  
Pharmacy Technician  
*(Pharmacy)*



**Joel Mpolokang**  
Driver  
*(EIT)*



**Tabona Maluke**  
Security Guard  
*(EIT)*



**Graceful Mulenga**  
Biostatistician  
*(Lab)*



**Tekanyo Chelani**  
Research Assistant  
*(Hope II)*



**Sainah Moremi**  
Research Assistant  
*(Hope II)*



**Bokamoso Makgekgenene**  
Research Assistant  
*(Hope II)*



**Peo Ntlhaga**  
Research Nurse  
*(Hope II)*



**Kgotla Molefhe**  
Driver  
*(Hope II)*



**Lesego Onneetse**  
Research Nurse  
*(Motheo)*



**Moakanyi Ramogodiri**  
QA/ QC Coordinator  
*(CTU)*



**Lorato Thamage**  
Head Research Nurse  
*(CTU)*



**Khumo Mmolaatlou**  
Senior Research Nurse  
*(Tshireletso)*



**Precious Mpondi**  
Quality Assurance Nurse  
*(Tshireletso)*



**Patricia Ketlogetswe**  
Admin Assistant/ Cleaner  
*(Hope II)*



**Gorata Lehubitsa**  
Lab Assistant 1  
*(Laboratory)*

# Publications

[Perceptions of prevalence and management of post-acute sequelae of SARS-CoV-2 \(PASC\) infection among healthcare workers in Kweneng District, Botswana: Report of a district-wide survey.](#) Mamalelala TT, Karmen-Tuohy S, Chimbwete L, Mokone DJ, Shapiro R, Young C, Schwanke Khilji S. PLOS Glob Public Health. 2024 Nov 27;4(11):e0003865. doi: 10.1371/journal.pgph.0003865. eCollection 2024. PMID: 39602378

[Increasing Care for Underserved Communities Through a Global Health Residency Training Program.](#) Zeigler C, Jacobs ZG, Schwanke Khilji SU, Rice MK, Frink B, Carney PA. Ann Glob Health. 2024 Nov 22;90(1):70. doi: 10.5334/aogh.4501. eCollection 2024. PMID: 39620163

[Prevalence of sexually transmitted infection in pregnancy and their association with adverse birth outcomes: a case-control study at Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital, Blantyre, Malawi.](#) van der Veer C, Kondoni C, Kuyere A, Mtonga F, Nyasulu V, Shaba G, Morroni C, Gadama G, Gadama L, Kawaza K, Dube Q, French N, Lissauer D, Freyne B. Sex Transm Infect. 2024 Nov 18;100(8):517-523. doi: 10.1136/sex-trans-2024-056130. PMID: 39043612

[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, Kabugho 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 Nov 15;230(5):1224-1234. doi: 10.1093/infdis/jiae308. PMID: 38877762.

[Predictors of HIV seroconversion in Botswana: machine learning analysis in a representative, population-based HIV incidence cohort.](#) Cui Y, Moyo S, Pretorius Holme M, Hurwitz KE, Choga W, Bennett K, Chakalisa U, San JE, Manyake K, Kgathi C, Diphoko A, Gaseitsiwe S, Gaolathe T, Essex M, Tchetgen Tchetgen E, Makhema JM, Lockman S. AIDS. 2024 Nov 4. doi: 10.1097/QAD.0000000000004055. Online ahead of print. PMID: 39497537

## QUICK TIP

### Device Security

- Keep software and operating systems up to date.
- Ensure that all your devices are password protected.
- Do not share your device's password.

## QUICK TIP

### Session Management

- Always log out of your web accounts before you close your browser/tab.
- Lock your computer when you leave your workstation.



## 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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Botswana Harvard Health Partnership  
Private Bag BO320 Gaborone  
Plot No. 1836, Northring Road, Princess  
Marina Hospital, Gaborone  
Tel: +267 3902671, Fax: +267 3901284  
Web: [www.bhp.org.bw](http://www.bhp.org.bw)

