

Partners Commence Efforts to Establish a New Medical Technology Program in Namibia

AIDS is the leading cause of death in Namibia, where an estimated 21 percent of the country's 2 million inhabitants are living with HIV.

Namibia's response to the epidemic is impeded by a severe shortage of qualified medical technologists, who play a critical role in HIV care by informing decisions about ART and related treatment by providing CD4 counts, basic metabolic profiles, and other necessary diagnostics.

Currently, there are only 160 medical technologists in the country and the infrastructure and expertise to train more lab professionals does not exist. Members of a Twinning Center partnership established in December 2007 with PEPFAR support are working to change this by launching a new bachelor's degree program in medical technology.

The CDC-funded partnership links the Polytechnic of Namibia in Windhoek with the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) in Little Rock.

Partners are working together to develop a nationally accredited curriculum for the medical technology program, along with related training materials. They are also focusing on faculty and organizational capacity development to ensure more effective administration, expansion, and sustainability of the new four-year degree program.

Three experts from the Polytechnic traveled to Little Rock March 7-13, where they worked side-by-side with their UAMS counterparts.

During the professional exchange, Polytechnic decision-makers Tjama Tjivikua, rector; Neavera Olivier, director of planning and international relations; and Andre Cronje, head of the Bio Medical and Health Sciences Department, got a first-hand look at successful medical technology programs in action.

The exchange also included tours of the Arkansas Department of Public Health Laboratories as well as various UAMS campus labs and teaching facilities.

Partners began curriculum development for the newly launched specialization in Namibia and Dr. Tjivikua made a presentation titled "Namibia: Health and Challenges" for UAMS staff and students.

According to US partnership coordinator Donald Simpson, chairman of Laboratory Sciences at UAMS, "Leaders at the Polytechnic understand that health is a resource for, and an outcome of, sustainable development. The support and infrastructure they are providing is truly amazing."