



American International Health Alliance
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AIHA Country Snapshot: South Africa

FALL 2011

AIHA PARTNERSHIPS IN SOUTH AFRICA

- Walter Sisulu University /
University of Colorado School
of Medicine
(Clinical Associates)
- University of the
Witwatersrand / Emory
University
(Clinical Associates)
- University of Pretoria /
Arcadia University
(Clinical Associates)
- University of the Free State,
Centre for Health Science,
Research and Development
(Public Health Evaluation)

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HIV/AIDS Twinning Center Partnerships in South Africa

South Africa is home to a racially and culturally diverse population of 49 million people, including 5.6 million people living with HIV. According to a study conducted by the South African Department of Health in 2009, the national HIV prevalence rate is 29.4 percent, with rates ranging from around 17 percent to nearly 40 percent depending on the province. A sharp rise of multi-drug resistant TB among HIV patients poses a significant threat and has prompted national efforts to integrate treatment for HIV, TB, STIs, and other communicable diseases. A severe lack of trained medical providers, particularly in rural areas of the country, also represents a significant challenge to the country's health system. With support from the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the US Government team in country, the HIV/AIDS Twinning Center currently manages four partnerships in South Africa, including three university-to-university alliances that focus on strengthening a new bachelor's program that is preparing Clinical Associates, a new mid-level cadre of healthcare professionals that is helping to bring skilled care providers to areas of the country that need them most.

Strengthening Clinical Associates Programs

In 2008, the National Department of Health in South Africa launched a new Clinical Associates Program to increase the number of mid-level medical professionals in the workforce. This 3-year degree program produces qualified professionals — similar to Physician Assistants in the United States — who have the ability to assess patients, make diagnoses, prescribe appropriate treatments, and undertake minor surgical procedures under the supervision of medical officers. The introduction of this new cadre of mid-level workers is serving to strengthen primary healthcare services in the country by bolstering the number of trained healthcare providers working at community health centers and district hospitals.

In early 2010 with support from CDC/South Africa, AIHA launched the first of three university-based partnerships that are designed to strengthen the Clinical Associates programs being offered by each South African institution in an effort to increase the number of mid-level medical professionals in South Africa. Two more partnerships were established in the year that followed. In addition to overall management of the partnership programs, AIHA is also supporting collaboration and networking among all three partnerships to further bolster this emerging profession.

[Walter Sisulu University \(WSU\)](#) and the [University of Colorado School of Medicine](#) are collaborating to strengthen WSU's Clinical Associates Program through strategic faculty and staff development and mentoring, and by designing, implementing, and evaluating measures that describe the impact of newly graduated Clinical Associates on medical practice in district hospitals on the Eastern Cape. Partners are also working together to strengthen WSU's



Walter Sisulu University graduated South Africa's first cohort of 23 Clinical Associates in December 2010. These new medical professionals are now providing much-needed care to people living in rural areas of the country — mostly in Eastern Cape Province.

Free State Partners Awarded Public Health Evaluation Funding from CDC/South Africa

Twinning Center partners at the University of the Free State's Centre for Health Science, Research and Development were awarded funding from CDC/South Africa in 2011 to implement a public health evaluation with the goal of increasing uptake of HIV testing among TB patients in Free State Province.

The CDC approved their revised protocol and has released funding for initiation of the project.

AIHA is supporting their efforts to manage and implement the intervention and analysis phases of the evaluation, in part through the placement of an implementation science expert and a monitoring and evaluation expert through the Twinning Center's Volunteer Healthcare Corps.

AIHA/South Africa

The HIV/AIDS Twinning Center

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capacity to more effectively market, advocate, and make policy recommendations that promote the Clinical Associates profession in South Africa. As of October 2011, some key accomplishments of this partnership include conducting faculty development workshops for clinical preceptors and procurement of clinical simulation equipment to assure improved student training experiences. Partners completed a faculty training needs assessment survey and participated in the AIHA-sponsored Clinical Associates Forums and Health Professions Education Meeting conducted in mid-2011. They have also drafted evaluation protocols for the clinical site survey and selected principle investigators from WSU. In the coming year, their efforts will focus on continued faculty development and implementation of the site survey, including hiring a local research coordinator to manage data collection activities. AIHA will support the partnership by recruiting mentors through the Volunteer Healthcare Corps (VHC) who will be placed in the Eastern Cape for two-month periods to provide technical assistance and mentorship on research and clinical skills acquisition, as well as provision of evidence-based medical resources through its Learning Resource Center (LRC) project.



Clinical Associates training at all three universities places a strong focus on acquisition of practical skills with the majority of study being done at clinical placement sites. Above, a Wits student examines a young patient, while below, Pretoria students review a patient's x-ray.



The University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and Emory University have been working together since mid-2010. Faculty and staff development plays an important role in this partnership, as does strengthening student assessment and learning opportunities. Partners are also working to support research and program assessment capabilities at Wits, as well as to build capacity on advocacy and marketing of the Clinical Associates profession. Key accomplishments to date include conducting faculty development workshops for teaching staff, as well as clinical preceptors at district hospitals. Emory partners served as external examiners for final examinations at Wits and assisted with setting third-year learning objectives. They also shared test questions from the Emory Physician Assistant Program and helped develop the Clinical Associates National Exam. In the coming year, the Emory partners will participate in graduation ceremonies for the first cohort of Wits students. Together, partners will conduct follow-on faculty development workshops with a strong focus on bed-side teaching skills, giving feedback to students, and testing and evaluation. AIHA will support their work through the placement of clinical preceptor volunteers and the procurement of LRC resources to increase access to evidence-based clinical information at rural rotation sites.

AIHA established its third Clinical Associates partnership in early 2011. The University of Pretoria and Arcadia University are working together to strengthen Pretoria's Clinical Associates program by developing a tracking system to ensure that students at all 18 training sites are receiving adequate training hours and similar breadth of patient types. They are also collaborating to improve both formative and summative student assessments, as well as to design and carry out a Clinical Associates program evaluation. As of October 2011, partners have revised student log book data collection methods. The Arcadia partners contributed test questions for Pretoria's exams and acted as external examiners during finals. Partners also jointly participated in the development of the Clinical Associates National Exam. Planned activities for the coming year include developing student tracking software to enable better monitoring of student practical training in remote district hospitals. Four Pretoria faculty will participate in the Physician Assistant Education Association Educational Forum and Arcadia faculty will participate in the graduation ceremony for Pretoria's first cohort of Clinical Associates students to earn their degrees. As with the other two partnerships, AIHA will support their efforts by providing increased internet access and learning resource materials at rural rotation sites, as well as recruiting volunteers as needed through the VHC.

