College of Medicine
Research Support Center

Newsletter
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21ST RESEARCH DISSEMINATION CONFERENCE

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A word from the Director

On behalf of Research Support Centre (RSC) staff, I welcome you all to this edition of our newsletter.

2017 has been an eventful year to us at Research Support Centre. From 24th to 25th November, College of Medicine (CoM) hosted the 21st Research Dissemination Conference whose theme was “Driving the next decade of research in Malawi: Achieving health-related Sustainable Development Goals”. The conference was highly successful and for the first time in the history of CoM, it took two days. This newsletter edition brings you more details about the conference.

RSC looks forward to 2018. The centre has planned numerous activities including provision of new services. It is our hope that these will be of interesting to you our readers and all our stakeholders.

Dr Cecilia Maliwichi- Nyirenda

Director, Research Support Centre
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The College of Medicine hosted a Research Dissemination Conference from 24th to 25th November 2017. The theme for the conference was “Driving the next decade of research in Malawi: Achieving health-related Sustainable Development Goals”. This event provided an opportunity to researchers and students to network and share research findings. The conference comprised Research Open Day, Science Café and Oral and Poster presentations.

The Guest of Honor was Dr Dan Namalika (the Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Health) while Ms Seodi White (Director for Public Sector Reforms Management in the Office of the President and Cabinet) was the keynote speaker. The title of the keynote address was “Change and Transformation: Leadership and lived experiences as effective tools in public sector reforms in Malawi”. University of Malawi (UNIMA) Pro-Vice Chancellor, Prof Al Mtenje was among the dignitaries that graced the conference. Professor Ron Mataya (from Loma Linda University in the United States of America) gave the John Chiphangwi lecture. The lecture is an annual event which is given in memory of the father and founder of College of Medicine, Dr John Chiphangwi.

After the opening ceremony of the Research Dissemination Conference, there was the Research Open Day, and the objective of the function was to increase collaboration and showcase the research activities that take place at the College and its research affiliates (Blantyre Malaria Project, Johns Hopkins Project, Malaria...
Alert Centre, Malawi Epidemiological and Intervention Research Unit and Malawi Liverpool Wellcome Trust Clinical Research Programme. Academic departments and projects within the College and research affiliates displayed various items and equipment and materials which are used to educate the public on their research activities. During the ceremony, Directors of CoM research affiliates gave speed talks where they outlined strategic research activities in their institutions.

In the evening of the first day of the conference there was a Science Policy Café under the theme “Listening to Malawi’s young people: Ending child Marriages: Teen Pregnancies, Gender based violence, Adherence to ARV: Lived experiences: teenagers and parents, teachers” and it was held in the Library Auditorium. The panelists were Traditional Authority Kapeni, Hon. Julianna Lunguzi (Member of Parliament and Chair of Parliamentary Committee on Health), Wapulumuka Masambuka (ART Clinic Administrator at Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital) and Senior Superintendent Alex Simenti from Malawi Police Victims Support Unit.

RSC would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the departments and research affiliates who put a lot of work to come up with lovely pavilions. It was fascinating to see the different displays and the publics appreciation of their efforts. Feedback from the stakeholders who attended the function indicate that this was an educative moment and they look forward to hosting similar events at their respective institutions.
There were 10 parallel sessions on HIV & AIDS, Sexual Reproductive Health, Non Communicable Diseases, Health Systems, Emerging Issues, Communicable Diseases, Malaria, Nutrition, Mental Health and Maternal Health.

The Research Dissemination Conference is also used as a platform where students showcase their research projects. The student winners were categorized into Undergraduate level, Master level and PhD level. The first and second best Undergraduate Student Research Awards for 2017 were given to Samuel Mpinganjira and Kennedy Zambere and their project topics were “Cross-sectional study on hospitalization of children within the first six months of ART in Lilongwe” and “Assessing the relative abundance of malaria vectors trapped indoors and outdoors in Chikwawa, Southern Malawi” respectively. The first and second best Masters level Student Research Awards for 2017 were given to Yamikani Mbilizi and Dr Kazione Kulisewa and their project topics were “Impact of sexual violence among men who have sex with men in sub-Saharan Africa: findings from the HPTN 075 study” and “The characteristics and mental health profile of women and adolescent females seeking post abortion care services (PACS) at Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital (QECH)” respectively. The first and second best PhD level Student Research Award for 2017 were given to Save Kumwenda and Visopo Harawa and their research topics were “Inactivation of Helminths, Escherichia Coli and Salmonella in Fossa Alternas and urine diverting dry toilets in Malawi. An
Our featured guest:

In every issue, Research Support Centre brings you, our valued readers, a special guest. We interview prominent young or seasoned researchers at College of Medicine, a constituent college of the University of Malawi.

In this edition, Research Support Center gives an in-depth interview with Dr Benjamin Kumwenda

Who is Dr Benjamin Kumwenda?

I am a Malawian from Mzimba district, TA Mbelwa but born approximately four decades ago. I am the last born in the family of 9 children comprising three boys and six girls. I am a Christian, a father and husband of one wife - Grace. I did my primary education in a number of schools, but I will just mention two: Mua Primary in Dedza where I did most of my primary education and Ludzi Boys Boarding from where I was selected to go to Kasungu Secondary School. I did my BSc Computer Science at Chancellor College where I graduated in 2001. Then, I joined the College of Medicine in August 2001 as an Assistant Computer Manager. After that I continued postgraduate studies with a Higher Diploma in Computer Sciences in 2004, BSc Honors Degree (2005) and MSc Computer Science (2006 to 2007) at University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg South Africa. After working for two years at COM I proceeded to do a PhD in Bioinformatics at the University of Pretoria where I graduated in April 2014. Thereafter, I did a Postdoctoral Fellowship with Malawi-Liverpool Wellcome Trust, H3Africa on secondment for two years. Later, I was awarded the African Research Excellent Fund (AREF) fellowship by the
Medical Research Council, The Gambia Unit which enabled me to spend 9 months at the University of Liverpool at the Institute of Integrative Biology, Functional Genomics department.

**You are a prominent researcher at CoM, what are your current research interests?**

I do not consider myself as a prominent researcher, but rather a young researcher. I am a Bioinformatician also known as Computational Biologist. My research interests are in comparative genomics, multi-drug resistance, transcriptomics and pathogenesis of Salmonella. I mainly do Bioinformatics research, which is also known as dry lab.

**Why did you choose this field of research?**

I am a Bioinformatician (Computational Biologists), with computer background. I was interested in doing research in molecular biology and bioinformatics brings the two fields together very well. This offered me the chance and skills to conduct research in this field. I investigate Salmonella pathogenesis because of the diarrhea disease and systemic infections it causes which is made worse by the emerging multi-drug resistance.

**How has the research that you have done helped in the improvement of the country’s health sector?**

Although my research findings so far have given some insights on what is happening in the evolution and pathogenesis of *Salmonella* in Malawi, the results are not conclusive yet. However, if we find what we expect, my research will inform treatment of *Salmonella* and advise the public on how to take precautionary measures on environmental factors.

**What would you recommend be done to get more young men and women into this field of research?**

I think myself and others in the field have the responsibility of promoting the field and marketing it to young scientists. More importantly, we are pioneers of the field so we need to be examples for young scientists to be inspired to become Bioinformaticians as well.

**Please mention one or two professional accomplishments that you are most proud of**

Like I mentioned, I am a young researcher, so I have not accomplished much yet, but I will do so not many
years from now. So far, I am proud that I have significantly contributed to the starting of a Masters in Bioinformatics program at College of Medicine. I am also excited that in the last 12 months we have run 7 Bioinformatics short courses and trained 20 participants per course. This has brought more awareness of Bioinformatics in Malawi. Bioinformatics is more visible than ever. I have a few publications which I cherish but hope to do more in that regard.

**What has contributed to your success in life and what motivates you?**

I will rephrase the question to: ‘what has contributed to get you this far in your career’. As of now, I do not consider myself successful yet, I am just walking in my path. I have learnt to be alert and seize every opportunity that presents itself in my path, to adapt to situations and adjust accordingly. I started as an IT manager but have moved to computational biology. I have learnt that every person in your path is important, they might be holding an answer to your situation. It is therefore important to respect people below and above you always because you meet people for a reason.

**Any advice to young scholars out there who want to follow your footsteps?**

As young researchers, stay focused in your career path. Don't be money driven but be career driven then you will have both your career and money. And don't give up, sometimes you break through very fast in your career but sometimes it takes long, so stay focused.

**A part from being a prominent researcher, you are in the Department of Biomedical Sciences, Faculty of Biomedical Sciences and Health Professions and you are also the Head of Department in the Biomedical Sciences Department at the College of Medicine, can you tell us more about your job?**

First, let me thank members of the Biomedical Sciences (BMS) department for electing me as their Head and the College Principal for approving it. Let me also take this opportunity to thank the Deputy Head, Dr Anthony Mwakikunga who has given me maximum support and is always available. Together with him and departmental staff, we are doing our best to raise the status of BMS in as far as research, teaching and community engagement is concerned. In community engagement, we are improving the mortuary services, expanding the clinical chemistry lab and starting the new fertility clinic in Physiology section. My job basically is to man-
age administrative and academic affairs of the department. To ensure that staff members are doing their job (teaching, examining, doing research and collaborating with other researchers) but also that they are getting the support they need from the department and the College. The other part of the job is to communicate College of Medicine management decisions to members of staff.

**What motivated you to vie for this job?**

I took this job because I feel that I have a vision for the BMS department and also members of staff in the department. I also have an idea of what kind of department BMS ought to be. My task is to share that vision to BMS staff so that they can embrace it and move on with it. I would like to see members excel in their research and academic careers. I would like to see leaders emerge from BMS in research and academics. I would also like BMS to have a remarkable social impact but also academically compete at international level. This is what made me take this job.

**Any parting words?**

My last words are that, the greatest state any human being can attain is to serve others. We comprise only a small proportion of ourselves, the rest is in others and so we discover the greater part of ourselves when we honor and cherish others. The value of our lives doesn't come from getting from others, but from how much we give and serve others. That is what made great leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela. And so, let’s support, promote, celebrate and encourage each other.

*Thank you for taking your time to share with our readers your personal and professional experiences.*
In order to support research activities at the College of Medicine and all health related research institutions in Malawi, Research Support Centre’s Data Management Unit conducted “Introduction to Biostatistics using STATA” course from 13th to 15th September 2017. The purpose of the course was to acquaint personnel with skills in conducting research analysis using STATA. Nine participants attended the course and these participants were of different backgrounds including medical doctors, researchers, data clerks and they came from Mzuzu University, and College of Medicine.

RSC conducted a basic course in Good Clinical Practices from the 17th to 19th October 2017. The purpose was to equip participants with basic skills and practices in Good Clinical Practices, necessary for them to carry out various health related studies and clinical trials. The course was facilitated by RSC’s Clinical Trials Unit. Nine participants attended the course and they were drawn from the Blantyre Malaria Project and Malawi Liverpool Wellcome Trust Clinical Research Programme.

RSC conducted a refresher course in Good Clinical Practice from 9th to 10th November 2017. The course was conducted based on a request from Blantyre Malaria Project, which stressed on the need for some of their staff to go through the refresher course. In total, four participants attended the training. The course was RSC’s Clinical Trials Unit.
Research Support Centre’s Research Seminars provide a forum for researchers and students to show case and share research work which is happening in faculties and departments at College of Medicine as well as in research Institutions affiliated to College of Medicine. Participation is open to all, including students. Participants are also treated to a light lunch. The event starts from 12:00 noon to 1.00pm and a calendar of upcoming research seminars is posted on RSC website (www.rsc.medcol.mw). The following Research Seminars were conducted between September - October 2017.

39TH RESEARCH SEMINAR

On 29th September 2017, Dr Tim Baker (Consultant at the Anaesthesia & Intensive Care Department at Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital and a Researcher at Karolinska Institute, Sweden) presented at the 39th Research Seminar. The topic of the research seminar was on “Critical Care in Low Resource Settings”.

40TH RESEARCH SEMINAR

On 17th November 2017, Dr Tonney Nyirenda (Deputy Head For Pathology Department) presented at the 40th Research Seminar and his topic was on “How Malaria infection compromises host immunity”.

41ST RESEARCH SEMINAR

On 13th December 2017, Professor Victor Mwapasa (Professor of Epidemiology & Public Health in the School of Public Health and Family Medicine), presented at the 41st Research Seminar and his topic was on “Research Funding Opportunities at CoM—Strategies to access the funds”.

Dr Tim Baker presenting at the 39th Research Seminar

Prof Victor Mwapasa presenting at the 41st Research Seminar
College of Medicine’s Research Support Centre is pleased to inform the public that it will be delivering various courses as per the training calendar below. This training calendar is accessible on www.rsc.medcol.mw.

The centre also wishes to announce that it provides trainings that are convenient to its stakeholders. For those that cannot manage to attend the courses at RSC, the centre will be able to deliver them at a venue convenient to you including your institutions. We are also available to deliver tailor-made courses to suit your requirements. We are pleased to announce that from 2018, we will be holding some of our courses in Lilongwe. To apply for a course, contact us on rscourses@medcol.mw. For any information related to trainings, please contact RSC Training Coordinator on rsctrainingcoordination@medcol.mw.

To provide tailor-made services to researchers, Research Support Centre conducts Research Clinics. During these clinics, researchers get one-on-one expert advice in research areas they are facing challenges. We are currently providing research clinics in the following areas:

- Statistical support
- Finance-related support
- Data management support
- Clinical trials monitoring-related support

For further inquiries, please send an email to rscresearchclinics@medcol.mw.


Cancer Pathology Turnaround Time at Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital, the Largest Referral Center in Malawi for Oncology Patients. Masamba LPL, Mtonga PE, Kalilani Phiri L, Bychkovsky BL. J Glob Oncol. 2017 Dec;3(6):734-739. doi: 10.1200/JGO.2015.000257. Epub 2017 Apr 11. PMID: 29244984


Quality of Surgery in Malawi: Comparison of Patient-Reported Outcomes After Hernia Surgery Between
PUBLICATIONS


Pilot Study of the Addition of Mass Treatment for Malaria to Existing School-Based Programs to Treat Neglected Tropical Diseases. Cohee LM, Chilombe M, Ngwira A, Jemu SK, Mathanga DP, Laufer MK.


The Research Support Centre (RSC) was established in 2006 at the University of Malawi's College of Medicine under the Office of the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research. The centre’s aim is to promote research by providing comprehensive research support and grants management services to College of Medicine (COM) faculty members, students as well as research affiliates and collaborators.

SERVICES PROVIDED

1. **Research clinics** - one-on-one consultations between researchers and experts in research areas where researchers are facing challenges.

2. **Clinical Trial Monitoring** - RSC has experienced Senior Clinical Research Associate who monitors clinical trials to ensure that the trials are GCP compliant.

3. **Clinical Trial Pharmacy** - In liaison with COM Pharmacy department, RSC manage a clinical trial pharmacy which stocks drugs that are used in clinical trials.

4. **Data Management** - RSC has a data management unit which has expertise in design, review and finalization of Case Record Form (CRFs); development of CRF completion guidelines and Data Validation Specifications; database design and implementation; Development of Window-based, Web or Mobile Electronic Data Capture systems; Data Processing Validation; data entry, cleaning, integration and analysis.

5. **Grants Management** - through provision of pre-award and post-award support e.g. budget development, risk management, procurement.

6. **Translation** - translation of documents in the following languages: Chichewa, English, Sena, Tumbuka and Yao.

7. **Training courses** - RSC has comprehensive training programme. For information on upcoming courses, visit www.rsc.medcol.mw to get a copy of the training calendar. If you would like to have a tailor-made course, contact rsctrainingcoordination@medcol.mw.

8. **Provision of research information** - RSC is a hub for research related information. Some of the information available includes information on funding and training opportunities. The information is accessible on RSC’s website (www.rsc.medcol.mw).

9. **Research Governance** - Through CoM’s IRB, the RSC has established a range of regulations, principles and standards of good practice aimed at improving the quality of research and also to protect the welfare of the study participants. RSC has also set up a risk manage unit.

Contact Us

Give us a call or write us for more information about our services and products

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