Message from the Principal Investigator, HEPI Project

Greetings from the HEPI-HESSU project. We are delighted to present to you the Fifth Edition of the HEPI Newsletter.

We are in the 4th year of HEPI Project implementation, and we have had great accomplishments in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The articles reflect what has happened during the last 4 years. The Scientific Conference was a great success and we hope that we will continue to have these conferences on an annual basis.

We are excited by the research capacity built among undergraduate, graduate students as well as faculty. We are proud of the many publications that are coming out of the research effort.

dev development, research in the field of health professions education, non-communicable diseases and other priority areas including HIV/AIDS. We should specifically continue to build capacity for e-learning and other innovative methods of learning.

I hope you enjoy reading the articles in this edition.

I wish you a happy & Prosperous 2022.

This edition highlights some benefits from many of the HEPI Partners the key areas of the HEPI project.

I hope that faculty and students fully utilise the HEPI project to enhance student centered learning, faculty
1 TRANSFORMING HEALTH PROFESSIONS EDUCATION (HPE) POST CONFERENCE REPORT

Ms. Evelyn Bakengesa, HEPI-SHSSU Program Coordinator

Event Summary
The Conference was organized by Makerere University College of Health Sciences under the auspices of the HEPI Project that is funded by the Fogarty International Center of the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of State’s Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator and Health Diplomacy (S/GAC), and President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) (Award Number 1R25TW011213). The conference which took place on the 28th to 29th May 2021 was blended in nature having limited physical presence of some delegates at Hotel Africana in Kampala. Other several delegates and speakers attended virtually. There were 60 delegates online and 60 delegates physically present. The theme of the conference was: Transforming Health Professions Education (HPE) in the 21st Century: from Theory to Practice.

Overview
Over the two days, the Health Professions Education (HPE) Conference, that was blended in nature brought together students, health practitioners (doctors, nurses, pharmacists and allied health professionals), policy makers and faculty from across various institutions. This reflects the inter-professional nature of the conference. The conference comprised of short oral presentations, key note addresses on topical issues in HPE as well as round table discussions on various aspects of health professions education. The delegates were from across Eastern Africa and beyond who convened to share experiences, ideas and challenges that affect the training of health professionals. The sub-themes of the conference were:

- Competency Based Education
- Inter-Professional Education
- Assessment
- Simulation
- Clinical training
- Community Based Education
- Mentorship
- Quality assurance
- Graduate education
- Basic Science Education
- Research, Innovations & Scholarship

Conference Format: There were 7 sessions, with 3-5 speakers per session. Each speaker was given 15 minutes to present, followed by 5-10 minutes for plenary discussions. The conference was structured to foster discussion between participants around the sub-themes. This was achieved through sessions that ranged from Keynote addresses, Oral presentations, Round table discussions and the Opening ceremony that was graced by Prof. Umar Kakumba, the first Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs, Makerere University.

Conference Presentations: The presentations from delegates spanned all the sub-themes and included topics such as:

- Inter Professional Education
- Innovations in Teaching and Learning
- Transformative Health Professions Education
- The role of Regional / International Networks in transforming HPE
- Transforming Biomedical Science Education
- The role of Graduate education in strengthening the Health System: Situation, Challenges and Opportunities
- Improving Teaching & Learning
- Innovative Student Learning
- Simulation Based Education
- Nursing Education

Registrations: Registration for the conference was open to students, policy makers and academics. However, since the conference was held during the time of the COVID-19 global pandemic, physical
attendance was for only those who were invited (invitations were sent to individual emails) and no attendee paid for attendance.

**Key note speakers**: The key note speakers were:

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<td>Prof. Patrick Kyamanywa, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Kampala International University, Uganda</td>
<td>Health Professions’ Education in the COVID 19 Era: Challenges and Opportunities</td>
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<td>Dr. Rose Clarke Nanyonga Clarke International University, Uganda</td>
<td>The role of Nursing Education in strengthening the Health system</td>
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<td>Prof. Sam Luboga Chairperson, Education Service Commission</td>
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<td>Dr. David Gordon President WFME</td>
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<td>Dr. Jeanette Mladenovic President FAIMER</td>
<td>The role of leadership development in the transformation of Health Professional Education</td>
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**Student Involvement**: To encourage student participation in the conference, students were supported to attend and to present their abstracts. There was also a student- led Round Table Discussion session with a theme: *Student’s voices “Research Involvement”: Challenges, Opportunities, and Benefits.*
Comments from some participants

“To me the conference was a true success, I enjoyed every moment! Very professional organisation, people from various backgrounds and countries, excellent venue, great quality speakers, opportunities for discussion and networking” – Participant, Clarke International University.

“The overall organisation was perfect! Most of the speakers were outstanding and the topics covered were apt. Handling of the conference was particularly commendable. The venue was reached without stress” – Lecturer, Busitema University

“The Conference was very interesting, dealing with subjects of academic, scientific, professional and social relevance. For me, it was very important to discuss the main problems and tendencies regarded to health professional education. It was possible to share a gradient of points of view of lecturers, speakers, mediators from different institutions” – Lecturer, Makerere University

“It was a good platform for discussions and exchange of information. The setting was very nice, the food excellent. It would have been nice, if the abstracts would have been available”. – Student

“There is need for greater involvement of institutional leaders, although I recognize that this is not easy”. – Student

Get more information about the event: https://news.mak.ac.ug/2021/05/dr-kakumba-officially-opens-hpe-conference-2021/
BEYOND CLINICAL PRACTICE TO CAPACITY BUILDING DURING POST GRADUATE ELECTIVE PLACEMENT

Dr. Beatrice Kyomugisa, Senior House officer, Department of Paediatrics and Child Health Makerere College of Health Sciences

The four-week elective placement is the time that generates a lot of excitement among pediatric post graduate students. It’s all about exploring the new environment and is the time where everyone feels relaxed by spending time in work settings outside the university and focusing on specific activities of their choice.

As people were fantasizing about abroad and upcountry travels, my excitement was quite different. My focus was adding value to capacity building. It didn’t take me a lot of time to figure out what to do during the placement. To be honest, I didn’t know how to compress the ideas of the guidelines to a pocket friendly protocol book. I shared my new innovation with my supervisor and she was very glad to supervise this amazing piece of work. I whatsoever had no much experience in computer but I was ready to face the academic challenge.

The first days were tough and needed a lot of focus. However, the work got better as days progressed.

I really did a lot of editing and I gained a lot of computer skills beyond Master of Medicine (Pediatrics). The worst moment was when my computer suddenly shut down and I lost most of the edits. This made me feel stressed but I wasn’t forsaken. At certain times, I thought my supervisor would be exhausted, but amazingly, she was so patient and supportive. In couple of weeks the work was awesome and it was worth the time. I later discovered my hidden amazing talent and I was so excited to present this final work to the department to earn my outstanding final score. This project work was formulated to add value to the existing guidelines for quick reference in the emergency settings.

My special thanks go to Dr. Nicolette Nabukeera and Dr. Thereza Were Piloya for the unconditional support, continuous encouragement and immense contributions towards the success of this work. I also extend my appreciation to Makerere University in particular the Department of Pediatrics for this amazing course unit. Lastly, I acknowledge the support from HEPI - SHSSU program for giving me another opportunity to share my experience. May God bless you abundantly.

THE HEPI-SHSSU SCHOLARSHIP IN FAMILY MEDICINE – A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE

Dr. Brenda Tusubira, SHO, Department of Family Medicine, School of Medicine, Makerere College of Health Sciences

Three years ago, I made the decision to pursue a Master of Medicine Degree in Family Medicine. I longed to promote and participate in the delivery of health care that has the following elements; continuity, comprehensiveness, coordination, accountability, and most of all, people centeredness, although I did not fully comprehend these elements at the time. I also wanted to get better equipped to mentor and train
other individuals to become health professionals who would provide quality health care services to the population.

These concepts are core aspects of the training provided in the Family Medicine program, so having been admitted into the program, I was very excited to start my journey. My concern was the "not so little" prerequisite to attaining a Master’s Degree, the research component. I had no experience whatsoever. To me it was a riddle wrapped in an enigma and it honestly scared me. Three years down the road, I am happy to report that my views have changed. I have had the opportunity to interact with different individuals that have been willing to take the time to explain and guide me through every step of the research process right from proposal writing to approval by the ethics committee, to data collection and analysis and finally writing up of findings for a dissertation and manuscript. I have learnt more than I could have ever imagined.

This feat does of course require financial resources and being awarded funding by HEPI-SHSSU has played a significant role in attaining the knowledge, skills and competences that I need as I start my career as a Family Physician. To me, the award has offered more than financial support. The Master of Medicine programs are time bound and unlike many of the course units offered, research doesn’t have a schedule. It is not offered at a particular time within a particular semester. So the first thing one has to learn is how to manage their time, which for one reason or another always seems to be non-existent. It helps to be accountable to someone and I am grateful for both the HEPI-SHSSU team and the team at the Department of Family of Medicine for doing exactly that. From the point of concept development, every 3-6 months I was and I am still required to provide a progress report to the team which has helped me to keep on track. The HEPI-SHSSU team has also provided training that has been very instrumental. One example is the course in bioethics which gave me an understanding of the ethics underlying research especially where human subjects are involved. As we strive to fill the gaps in knowledge, are we asking ourselves how our research benefits the community within which we choose to do our research? Do the benefits outweigh the risk? Is social justice being observed? The second example is the manuscript writing workshop which I participated in recently. As I mentioned earlier, many of these steps were new to me. Having the opportunity to engage with people that had been through this before and were able to lay out the process from first principles was beneficial. I am now working on my manuscript with the aim of getting it published. Given where I was at the beginning, this is a great place to be.

As I conclude my training, I must say I have grown as a doctor. In regards to research, I may not be that complete expert. However, I have the confidence to contribute to the conversation and continue developing. As I embark on my career as a Family Physician, I believe this change will be reflected in my actions. I look forward to training, supervision and mentorship of others both in clinical practice and in research; it is important to build a knowledge base that is specific to our context with an aim of finding solutions that are context specific. I look forward to continued learning and growth with the aim of benefitting the people around me. Thank you to HEPI-SHSSU and the Department of Family Medicine for making all this possible.
HOW IT ALL CAME TO BE!
Godfrey Wekha, MBChB Year 5, Makerere College of Health Sciences

My journey as an early career researcher started with a response to the call for application for research training under the HEPI program. Excited to participate in the training program, and naive of how much time and effort I needed to put into the program, I applied. Thankfully, I was offered an opportunity to participate. If I may say, it wasn’t as easy as I thought it would be. During the training, we were given tasks upon completion of each training module and these had to be completed for one to progress normally. Failure to do so meant having to deal with the subsequent modules and the previous ones. Coupled with course work, I started to have second thoughts to extent of contemplating withdrawal from the training. Well as the saying goes “every cloud has a silver lining”. I met a fellow student, who during a conversation told me that he envied me for being among the few who were chosen to undergo the training.

As trainees, we were supposed to each get a mentor, in this case, a specialist in one of the medical fields. Being my first time, I expected that my mentor was going to do most of the work. I mean, given his level of experience in the field of research. Our first meeting left me blank without a sense of direction. As the entire conversation seemed like I was watching that very nice movie in a language I didn’t understand with the subtitles written in Hindi. However, what stuck with me was when he asked me how I plan on proceeding with the project. This question stimulated me to seek more information on proposal development from textbooks, articles, and web videos. This not only enabled me to ground myself in basic research methods but also improved my knowledge base in the field of research. Today, I am proud to say that I am an early career researcher and I’ve authored and co-authored 8 publications. My most recent publication was a 10-year facility-based retrospective study on colorectal cancer in Uganda. Thanks to Prof. Moses Galukande my mentor and Prof. Sarah Kiguli the HEPI PI who through their support, the project was a success.

Selection and review of patients charts during data collection
ONLINE PEDAGOGY: HEPI’S INDELIBLE MARK ON BUSITEMA UNIVERSITY

Dr. Joseph L. Mpangi, Deputy Dean, Busitema University
Faculty of Health Sciences

In Uganda, the first COVID-19 lockdown transformed online teaching and learning at Busitema University from a ‘want’ to a ‘need.’ However, the transformation found the University ill-prepared in almost all the areas. Nearly all the lecturers had limited knowledge and skills required to develop online courses. Staff offices and more than 80% of the lecture rooms lacked or had poor internet connectivity. Students were neither enrolled on the Learning Management System (LMS) of the university nor were they trained on how to learn using the LMS. Apparently, Busitema University LMS was yet to be configured. However, ill-prepared as it was, Busitema University could not afford to sit back and wait till the return of pre-COVID-19 teaching environment. In any case, the country’s Ministry of Education and Sports had, through the National Council for Higher Education, recommended resumption of studies in the institutions of higher learning, but with online teaching and learning assuming a central position in the new training environment.

Busitema University conducted a needs assessment on its online pedagogy and compiled the findings into short-term, medium term and long-term requirements. Being a publicly owned institution, Busitema University prepared and submitted the requirements to the government of Uganda. At the same time, aware of the uphill task of securing the requested funding from government, the University started lobbying for support from some of the ongoing projects in the institution. Among projects at the Faculty of Health Sciences was HEPI, a shortened form of ‘Health Professions Education and training for strengthening the health system and services in Uganda.’ With support from HEPI-SHSSU, Busitema University Faculty of Health Sciences (BUFHS) extended the faster internet to all the staff offices and to the lecture room for the first year undergraduate students. Internet accessibility in the lecture rooms for clinical students and graduate students was also strengthened. About seven years ago, BUFHS approved and embraced a policy of equipping the office of every Head of Department with a desktop...
computer. These computers lacked the requisite accessories for online teaching. Consequently, HEPI-SHSSU equipped these computers with headphones, cameras and installed critical but missing software. HEPI-SHSSU bought a server for the faculty to help especially in the setting up of an effective local area network, which would promote and strengthen virtual pedagogy.

Following the first lockdown, Makerere University-HEPI team organized staff trainings in the development of online courses and offered 14 slots to BUFHS. The offer was warmly embraced. As these trainings were underway however, the need to extend similar training opportunities to other staff at BUFHS forced the faculty administration to look for additional support, outside HEPI. SEED Global Health, a project promoting quality of care in maternal, neonatal and child health, supported the training of the rest of BUFHS academic staff in the pedagogy for the 21st century, including the development of online courses, thus building upon the strong foundation set up by HEPI. Elsewhere, Busitema University had mobilized its own resources plus other projects’ support to configure and operationalize the university LMS, to conduct baseline surveys on students’ readiness for online learning, to train and enroll students on LMS, to set-up support structures for online teaching and learning, etc. By the beginning of the year 2021 therefore, BUFHS had started using the university LMS for online teaching and learning. Indeed, during the second COVID-19 lockdown in Uganda, June – October 2021, BUFHS taught all the courses for semester I and II of academic year 2020/21 save for practicals, clinicals and examinations, thanks to the online teaching and learning. Central to all these successes has been HEPI which is surely going to leave an indelible mark on BUFHS.
THE EXPERIENCE OF CLINICAL TEACHING AT KABALE REGIONAL REFERRAL HOSPITAL AS A STUDENT OF A MASTER OF SCIENCE IN HEALTH PROFESSIONS EDUCATION

By Kenyange Grace Annet, MScHPE Student, Makerere College of Health Sciences

I am very grateful to be part of the graduate class which commenced in 2019 September as the 3rd cohort since the Master of Science Degree in Health Professions Education commenced at Makerere University College of Health Sciences. I am humbled for the scholarship and support given to me by HEPI-SHSSU which has enabled me to pursue this Master’s program. Before the scholarship offer, I was in doubt whether I would afford to raise the financial resources required for the program amidst other essential demands. I work at Kabale University School of Medicine (KABSOM) in the Nursing Department where I am also a Principal Laboratory Technician. One of my duties is to train, supervise and assess undergraduate nursing students in the clinical area. In nursing institutions, clinical teaching is one of the cornerstones for students to translate theory into practice while managing patients.

At KABSOM, students are allocated to hospital wards for practice after the coverage of the theoretical part of the course unit to put in practice what was covered in class. For example, after completion of medical and surgical nursing theories, they are allocated to the respective wards for practice. This has enabled students to be competent nurses wherever they work thus establishing a good image for the university. I am so thankful for the journal club sessions which are part of the MHPE training. These sessions have strengthened my research methods and also improved and simplified my clinical teaching methods and competences because I have interacted with students performing different tasks in different departments in the clinical area.
Clinical teaching is very important for the undergraduate student nurses as it prepares them for Entrustable Professional Activities (EPAs). I have been observing certificate and diploma nurses in clinical placements, rarely being taught by their instructors in the clinical area. Instructors only come to check whether students are present on the ward.

This experience, made me to think about making a research on Students experiences on clinical area so as to discover more on the students’ satisfaction about clinical teaching and learning. The MHPE training at Makerere University with support from HEPI will equip me with more skills to improve clinical training of nurses at Kabale University.

TUFH 2021 was an exciting conference that gave me a lot of food for thought for my practice as a clinician as well as my PhD. I am grateful to the Health Professionals Education Partnership Initiative (HEPI) for the financial support I received to attend the conference. On day 1 of the conference, I attended the workshop on stories and the art of transformation. This was a creative session that explored social accountability through art work. The workshop used arts based integrated research methods that had previously been used in creating a website and virtual gallery. The session discussed what social accountability meant for the participants and their communities. The themes that arose included: respect, humility, service, engaging to do something useful, talking to people in the community, and empowering the community through working with them. The members of the workshop were also engaged to discuss what problem solving was needed for social accountability to be better implemented. The areas identified included: defining what we understand by social accountability and developing a common understanding, where each of the collaborators would fit in. It was noted that we cannot be the whole solution and there needs to be collaboration between all the stakeholders. At the end of the session, each member created an
art piece that showed what social accountability meant to each of them.

On the second day of the conference, I attended the TUFH Talks. My highlight of the TUFH Talks was ‘The Limerick School Cycle Bus: This project showed how simple innovations can make a big difference with a bit of perseverance. The parents in the community of Limerick converged to cycle with their children to school and in the process advocate for safe roads and communities for children. The benefits of this project included: reducing pollution, engaging children as advocates for change and encouraging child friendly cities. Other talks explored: Student volunteered Inter-Professional Health fairs as a means to improve collaboration for greater social accountability with a focus on the value of appreciative inquiry.

On the final day of the conference, I attended the TUFH documentaries. The sessions which struck me the most were on teaching empathy to students through simulation and the compassionate care clinic in Kenora, Canada. I found the compassionate care clinic for homeless people to be interesting and applicable to our setting where there are many underserved populations. The final session I attended was on the presentation of the ISAT Self-Assessment for various institutions. The discussion raised a number of areas of interest to me including: the need for support programs for underserved students, the value of clearly mapping out stakeholders and advocating for country wide admission policies that foster social accountability in medical schools.

Overall, the conference was a great success and I am now looking forward to using the lessons learnt in my own PhD work on social accountability. I am also hoping to attend the conference in British Columbia Canada in 2022 to present my own work on Social Accountability and Adolescent pregnancy.

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A TIMELY SUPPORT THAT GUARANTEED MY COMPLETION OF THE MASTER’S DEGREE, THUS REALIZING MY DREAM

By Mudarshiru Bbuye, Research Fellow, Makerere University Lung Institute

It was that time during the course of my Masters of Public Health at Makerere University, that I was overwhelmed by studies, work and personal responsibilities. Thinking of a dead year was on my mind. Here came HEPI scholarship. Through the process I applied and was awarded a study grant by HEPI. That is the re-birth of Mudarshiru Bbuye’s academic career. This was a timely support that guaranteed my completion of the Master’s degree, thus realizing my dream. Through training and mentorship from the HEPI team, I improved my writing skills in proposal writing and presentation. This facilitated my subsequent research proposal titled “Linkage to HIV care among adults with positive HIV oral self-testing results in Uganda, a Mixed methods study”. I was also able to improve my skills in referencing, research design and implementation.

I have completed my Master’s research thesis, defended it at the School of Public Health, Makerere University and submitted the first manuscript for possible publication to Hindawi AIDS Research and Treatment Journal. From this research, I determined the factors associated with linkage to HIV care among adults with positive HIV oral self-testing results and also described the barriers and facilitators to linkage to HIV care among this group. HIV oral self-testing is a new HIV testing approach in Uganda targeting key
I will forever be grateful to the entire HEPI team, my HEPI mentor- Dr. Roy William Mayega and my supervisor Dr. Aggrey David Mukose for the tremendous support through the concept, proposal and thesis development process and subsequent successful thesis defense. I also remain indebted to the HEPI-SHSSU project for supporting my Master’s program and research and I look forward to becoming an important Public Health specialist in Uganda and the world.

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THE HEALTH PROFESSIONS EDUCATION TRAINING: AN IMPORTANT OPPORTUNITY TO APPRECIATE THE NEED TO IMPROVE TRAINER KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

By Mumbere Eliud, MSChPE Student, Makerere University College of Health Sciences

Health Professions training institutions world over depend on teaching (tertiary) hospital staff for teaching and mentoring of undergraduate students. In the community, the students will derive their training from Health unit staff even if the latter are of a lower qualification or lesser level of training than the students. In countries like Uganda, the health workforce is generated more from allied health training colleges as well as nursing schools. In teaching hospitals, the doctors and senior staff are part and parcel of the examiners especially for allied health and nursing students. However, many of the hospital staff especially medical officers are not professional in terms of teaching or mentoring of the students.

With the onset of a health professions education training program at such a higher level as is the MSChPE at Makerere University College of Health Sciences, the graduates have an extra motivation to take on professional training in health professions education. The students of MSChPE especially those that have been involved in health professional training before, have been able to identify the gaps that have been prevalent in their presumed expertise, courtesy of the learning acquired through the MSChPE program. Personally, I recently got involved in examination of practical examinations in some of the Allied Health Training Schools and having been involved in the exercise for quite some time, I was able to recognize the flaws that have been taking place and could have been undermining the authenticity and or the validity of our examinations for a long time.

A case in point is the Objective Structured clinical examination (OSCE) assessment that seems to have been and continues to be mismanaged. OSCE is defined as a method of assessment of clinical competences (medical knowledge, patient care, professionalism, communication and interpersonal skills) evaluated in a well-planned and structured way. This is meant to take place in a series of timed (5 to 10 minutes) stations through which examinees are assessed by one or more examiners while performing standardized clinical tasks on a “standardized patient”. In our settings contrary to this, the OSCE examinations have always been managed as
though it is a theoretical paper where students are given questions and answer sheets, the assessor looks on as the student scribes the answers, until the timed period elapses. The examiner will then mark the answer sheets the same way it would have been with a theory paper. I have taken it upon myself to request the Examination Board staff to make necessary adjustments for improvement.

The faults that have been pertinent with the status quo may be rooted in the lack of awareness about the right way to do things on part of the examination planners as well as the implementers. This is not withstanding the fact that many private health training schools have sprung up everywhere with challenges in sourcing reliable teaching and or training staff. It would therefore be prudent to have more continuous professional development done for the people involved in the health worker training programs and with many more shortcomings will be mitigated. The author is a long time examiner of practical exams in allied health colleges but training to become a health professionals’ educationist under the HEPI-SSHU program support. It is hoped that following completion of the MHPE programme, I will become a change agent in as far as improving assessment of clinical competencies is concerned.
I am Nabugwere Robinah Sharon, an intern Nurse at Mulago National Referral Hospital. I completed a Bachelor’s degree of Science in Nursing at Makerere University. Research is growing each day providing more information and increasing understanding of different topics which I am glad to be a part of. As a nursing student, one of the course units required that one needed to conduct a research study. My study was entitled, “Knowledge of postnatal danger signs and its associated factors among first-time mothers at Tororo General Hospital-Uganda”.

This study was conceptualized following an observation during my community placement where a lot of mothers especially the primigravidas were not able to assess that they were having postpartum haemorrhage until it was too late. However, one of the leading causes of maternal mortality is postpartum haemorrhage. There is thus need to be aware of these danger signs and to seek for immediate health care hence preventing death. Therefore, the aim of my study was to assess the level of knowledge of postnatal danger signs and factors associated with having this knowledge.

From my findings, there is low knowledge of postnatal danger signs among first-time mothers which calls for special health education during pregnancy and childbirth. The study also showed that having more antenatal care visits and access to media information platforms were significantly associated with knowledge of these danger signs. Therefore, the use of media sources to convey health information should be strengthened in the health care system.

I drafted out a paper from this study and currently the manuscript has been submitted to the African Journal of Midwifery and Women’s Health and is under review.

My heartfelt thanks goes to the entire HEPI team for the funding and mentorship, my mentor Dr. Mbalinda Scovia and my Supervisor Ms. Ayebare Elizabeth for offering me a platform to improve my research skills and their guidance through the research process.
THE NURTURED TALENT

By Nelson Ssewante, MBChB Year 5, Makerere College of Health Sciences

We spend most of our lives looking. Looking for what lies within us that we need to tell the world. Well, eventually, after smart and hard-working spells, we find it. Finding it is not a constant though, we ought to have the right support to streamline our search strategy. In HEPI, I found the right support to find my way. The greatest difference between the developed and the developing world lies in the variations in our mentorship strategies. For long, mentorship has been our greatest weakness as Africans. HEPI has realized the importance of undergraduate research and mentorship and through this, it has set the ball rolling for us to be change agents. The desire to see a healthy population has always been my dream, but never had I figured out how I can contribute to this. I knew somehow that I had the potential to be a key player in the field of science. Science is defined by research and research defines science by being a tool that allows evidence-based interpretation of theories to facts. In the year 2019, I got an opportunity to join the HEPI research training and mentorship program.

Without hesitancy, I welcomed the opportunity with both hands and here we are; grown into a mentor myself. Through a series of training, I was stimulated to think, to reflect on my hidden talents and then, I found a writer in me. Combining the skills, I learnt through such trainings with my writing skills, I was reborn into a new talent, an author and a researcher. It took me good months thinking of how I can use my talent to realize my dream of societal transformation until I fell back to HEPI for my first ever funded research project in 2021. As a proud 2019 cohort mentee, I took on the mantle to mentor my peers but most importantly, I have grown into an active researcher. Through HEPI we found a mentor, a group of a dedicated team that has transformed undergraduate research and I, can say that through it, my talent was nurtured!

Team members getting ready to go for data collection. From Right: Bereta Sanyu, Nelson Ssewante, Vanessa N. Nantagya and Lawrence S. Katumba
RISE FROM THE ASHES: COVID-19 PATIENT NUMBER 3166

By Rubahika K. Ntabaare, Resident, Paediatrics & Child Health, Kabale University School of Medicine

With blurry vision and a frail voice in a whisper, I mentioned my particulars to the admitting nurse. I was an inferno within an iceberg at the same time and a head that pounded louder than the church knell. My knees had tottered, I could barely support my own weight, and so with the support of a healing comrade, I lumbered to the room that would be my home for the next six days. I later learned that I was patient number 3166 admitted at the Kabale Regional Referral Hospital’s (KRRH) COVID-19 treatment center since its institution in the early months of the year 2020. Dexamethasone, Vitamin C, and admittedly some luck did the trick and got me slowly from hades. As I recovered my strength, it became clear to me how the health care team, the so-called COVID task force was exceedingly overwhelmed by the sheer load of patients during the onslaught of the second wave. The staff worked in small numbers and for over extended periods on so many patients. I had heard about COVID, read about it, but getting sick of it and my time in the isolation center exposed me to the reality of this nemesis. It was a grim experience to see the unfortunate few whose lungs were drowned to death by the COVID inflammatory storm.

The front-line health workers were supportive as well the patients already in the center who were forthcoming to share their food and other utilities. It was a quintessence of brotherhood -- typical of the Ugandan spirit of togetherness. Volumes can be written on how COVID, directly and indirectly, impacted our lives. For students, it stalled the normal academic progress, chased our patients from hospitals, and increased the cost of living, not to mention, the suffering from the infection itself. Furthermore, our own tutors, seniors in the field, were affected, infected and a score succumbed to this terror. But amidst the grief and sorrow, all hope is not lost. The pandemic has opened new avenues of learning namely E-learning which was accelerated and adopted as a supplementary mode of instruction.

This sets African institutions of higher learning at a comparative status to the developed countries. I extend my sincere gratitude to the COVID task forces at KRRH and those in all other hospitals. In addition, I convey warm spirits of comfort to those that lost their loved ones and wish them quick rejuvenation and positivity. Let us not despair, but hold our heads high, rise from the ashes and do that that we were meant to do: Save lives, alleviate suffering, and vanquish ignorance through research.
HEPI NOT ONLY GAVE ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN RESEARCH BUT ALSO TO BUILD MY PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

By Ruth Ketty Kisuza, Bachelor of Cytotechnology Year 3, Makerere College of Health Sciences

In my first year, I had interest to learn research and so I started learning how to write proposals from the internet. However, the interest to learn quickly vanished because I didn’t have the necessary motivation and mentorship to continue learning. Fortunately, in my second semester while leaving for hostel after my Anatomy practical, I found a notice by HEPI calling for motivated undergraduate students with interest in research to apply for a laboratory attachment and research mentorship program. For me, taking my time off to apply for the mentorship program was the beginning of a new path in developing my research career.

The mentorship program was not only an opportunity for me to be mentored by research professionals at the CHS but also grow my professional network. Building my professional network has been of great importance to me because it’s through these networks that I was able to explore similar opportunities within and outside the CHS. Using the skills gained from the mentorship class, I was able to collaborate with fellow undergraduate students in the program to write a research proposal on “Evaluation of different concentrations of Cefoxitin for detecting MRSA using Muller Hinton and Mannitol salt agar” that was accepted by HEPI for funding.

Not only have I developed my scientific writing skills through the different trainings by HEPI, but also learnt better presentation and communication skills. In addition, I have learnt how to write good resumes and cover letters mainly because of the various constructive feedbacks I received from the HEPI secretariat on my resumes. I have since used this knowledge to apply for different opportunities within and outside the CHS.

Looking back, I can confidently say that I am proud that I took time off to send in my first application and I am even more proud that I was given the opportunity to participate in the mentorship program. I strongly encourage all my fellow undergraduate students at the CHS to take up the different opportunities made available to them by HEPI and any other platforms.

HEPI- A SPECIAL THANK YOU!

By Nalubega Raihanah, Master’s in Pediatrics and Child Health II, Makerere College of Health Sciences

It was August 2019 when I enrolled for my postgraduate studies for a Master’s degree in Pediatrics and Child health. I really anticipated an exciting journey but also scared at the same time. Worried about the unknown but also being optimistic that all will be well. I received several words of encouragement from a number of people and indeed I set the ball rolling.

Amidst the journey, I noticed a number of challenges including having to pay my tuition fees. However, I was determined to accomplish my goal. Having to juggle through a number of things to make ends meet, I heard of the Health-Professional Education
Partnership Initiative (HEPI) scholarship. This is a scholarship that has given a helping hand to hundreds of students from a number of universities here in Uganda with a passion to pursue their dreams/ careers in the medical fraternity. It also offers opportunities for research training and manuscript writing. I applied for the scholarship and I can happily say, the rest was history. From the time I was granted my award letter, I have been able to concentrate on achieving my career and working extra hard so as to become the best Pediatrician I can be and save the lives of the little ones!

Thank you HEPI for this lifetime opportunity. I shall forever remain gratified. Such opportunities speak volumes to many. **A SPECIAL THANK YOU!**

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**15 WHAT THEY DON’T TELL US ABOUT RESEARCH AS UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS THAT HEPI HAS TOLD ME!**

*By Ignatius Asasira, MBChB Year 5, Makerere College of Health Sciences*

Reading this article maybe a little intriguing but captivating at the same time especially because the writer is a growing researcher who “tested the depth of the waters” in the world of research with both feet. I will narrate my personal experience and I hope I will inspire someone out there. “All researchers are rich, successful and you can see it from the nice cars parked in front of the School of Public Health within the College of Health Sciences” was the first opening statement that this fifth-year medical student told me while I was in my first year. I was excited honestly to hear that there was an avenue in the world of Medicine where I won’t “do a lot” but “become rich.” But what he did not tell me was the “why” to his statement, so the little boy in me went on a journey to dissect the science why “most researchers were rich” as I had been told. So, I moved to a one faculty member in the Department of Pediatrics and Child Health, Dr. Sabrina Bakeera-Kitaka (who later became my mentor) and innocently asked about the subject. I had read about her on google how she’s an Infectious Diseases researcher with plenty of publications especially on Adolescent Health. I was expecting to quench the thirst of my curiosity and perhaps hear an answer like “research is easy, you just need to ask participants like patients a few questions, put this data in table or pie chart form; make a correlation between an incident and an outcome and when you present to potential funders like World Health Organisation (WHO), money just flows.”

I was shocked by the depth of the requirements for you to become a good researcher, the dynamics of funding research studies, the process of the whole procedure from writing a proposal to collecting data up to the point of publication. She told me how many Ugandan researchers couldn’t be cited with their work on sites like PubMed because their “apparently good work” had been rejected tens of times by different journals and conferences due to different reasons. She also went on to correlate for me the meaning of “Clinical Research where I can still be a practicing doctor but scale up my practice by understanding the health needs of the community one is serving through research. As if that was not enough, I, for the first time, heard of the term “unfunded research.” I had wanted to believe that the word research definitely rhymes with the word funding and this belief had been partly watered by a classmate who did diploma first (and so appeared more senior) that made a statement “All those cars you see parked in the College of Health Sciences are due to HIV, because of HIV funding of research”.

*Asasira Ignatius, during a HEPI Research data collection session with a participant*
They may never tell you that research is not a side hustle to the main dish of reading the medical books, but rather its part of the main course. I joined the Research and Writer’s club Makerere University College of Health sciences where I later became President. In my second year as a student, I applied with a team of uprisng researchers for the 1st Cohort of HEPI funding under the study title: “Assessing factors associated with readiness to start art among youth seeking HIV services at HIV clinics in Mulago hospital”. HEPI took us through a number of trainings about research and gradually, it helped me understand that its not about getting rich so fast that we should be active researchers but rather contributing to solving emerging community and world challenges. HEPI gave me a chance to explore into my untouched potential of reasoning out “WHY” things happen the way they do; how events are related to the outcomes and HEPI went ahead to support us to host a series of webinar talks under the collaboration of MakCHS Research and Writers Club and Busitema Research Collaboration (BRA). This lasted for 3 months and it attracted over 300 students from the two institutions plus sister institutions and the sessions where well appreciated.

THANK YOU HEPI, THANK YOU!!!

IMPROVING IN-SERVICE HEALTH WORKERS RESEARCH CAPACITY THROUGH HEALTH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAININGS: EXPERIENCES FROM A RURAL SETTING IN UGANDA

By Namuyimbwa Lydia, Kabale University School of Medicine

Methodology: Two days Health profession education workshops was organized under the auspices of the HEPI Project. A total of twenty health workers attended the training workshop at Rubaya HClV. The workshop was facilitated by a team of doctors and nurse experts from Kabale University School of Medicine on proposal writing and collaborative research.

Results: A total of twenty practitioners from various health professions and cadres were trained on proposal writing and collaborative research. All health workers acknowledged the fact that the training was handy and they were to use the knowledge acquired to write proposals to address the current health problems in their health facility and surrounding communities. Two proposals were drafted in collaboration with the Kabale University School of Medicine staff and two HEPI Grants were won to support the proposed work.

Conclusion: The need for in-service health profession training on proposal writing and collaborative research was recognized by health workers and their knowledge and skills on proposal writing and collaborative research improved by the fact that the in-service health workers were in position to draft a number of proposals after the training. Therefore, continued training of in service health workers in research could be vital for updating their knowledge and skills and improving the quality of patient care through carrying out research and changing policies based on evidence.
One of the facilitators training participants at Rubaya Health Center IV

**PUBLICATIONS FROM THE HEPI SUPPORTED RESEARCH: FROM JULY 2020 – JUNE 2021**

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