

TOPICS

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Message from the Principal Investigator, HEPI Project

Greetings from the HEPI-SHSSU Project. We wish all of you a Happy and Fruitful 2023.

This Edition of the HEPI News Letter has voices from students and faculty from our Partner - Institutions that acknowledge support received in research training and implementation. This is a good testimony that HEPI has indeed served as a Research Training Grant.

The excitement of the undergraduate students calls for us to integrate research into health professions education, as a core competency. We should also have strategies to develop the capacity of all faculty to do research that addressees of our communities. I note that most of the articles in this edition are from students and faculty from the young universities in the partnership, a sign of equity and inclusion.

It is important to note that HEPI Partner Institutions have



Prof. Sarah Kiguli
PI-HEPI

embarked on strategies to sustain innovations in Health Professions Education, as demonstrated by the articles from Busitema and Kabale Universities.

We are in the last year of the HEPI Project and bring you more experiences and achievements in the next edition. We are grateful to all partners, stakeholders and our funder, the National Institute of Health (NIH)

I wish you great reading and encourage you to share your work in the next edition.

PROMOTING SCHOOL HEALTH PROGRAMS IS THE WAY TO GO: TOO MUCH FREEDOM AT CAMPUS EXPOSES UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TO RISKY SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS

By Dr Bahati Amon, Graduate of Master of Public Health, Kabale University



I am a professional medical doctor and Medical Officer, Kisoro District local government. My work profile includes training undergraduate, postgraduate medical students, health workers and management of patients' conditions. I am also involved in research in community based projects and coordination of outreach primary care programs. My area of interest is sexual health and in particular risky sexual behaviours, prevention and control. My professional goal is to contribute towards the improvement of the quality of life of students in higher institutions of learning with a focus on the following: Design and implementation of cost effective, sustainable and replicable programs on sexual health and research in understanding the interplay of various facilitators and barriers in sexual health.

The HEPI program helped me to strengthen the foundations of the school and out of school health programs that I am currently working on under Ministry of Health. It provided me with a platform to network and co-ordinate with senior mentors from Makerere, Kabale, Clarke International and Busitema Universities. My research for the HEPI Fellowship focused on "*Magnitude and factors associated with risky sexual behaviours among Undergraduate students aged 18-24 in Kigezi Sub region*" with a view to integrate sexual health into the primary care system.

I have realized that the school program of health care

interventions is still in infancy in Uganda. There is a limited evidence base to feed into sound policy making. There is no institution in the country that runs a formal certificate course in this field. The courses offered by universities outside Uganda are beyond the financial reach of most Ugandan researchers aspiring to work in this field. I have already attended two short training programs on Sexual Reproductive health and rights (SRHR), Adolescent Health Services (AHS) and have a basic understanding of the concepts and techniques used. The HEPI Program provided me with an opportunity to be mentored by experienced researchers in the field of sexual Reproductive Health. This developed capacity in me to plan and implement school health program in Kisoro District within primary and secondary schools and lead towards my goal of designing and implement cost effective, sustainable and replicable programs for school health programs. Kabale University has been ranked as one of the best youngest University in Uganda. It provided me with its resources and mentors with the best opportunities for learning and overall professional development. I am confident that I will be able to lead training and research programs on risky sexual behaviours reduction in primary, secondary and higher institutions of learning.

My HEPI supported research in the field of risky sexual behaviours addressed the issue of contributing factors and mitigation measures. Being employed as a Medical Officer at Busanza HC IV, and having been trained in sexual reproductive health, I was able to use this opportunity to access the hard to reach communities with sexual and reproductive health information. I strongly believe that an opportunity to be part of the HEPI fellowship program was valuable and enabled me to understand the nuances of the risky sexual behaviours. This program provided an

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ideal platform to fine tune my skills in school health activities. I am confident that these skills will help me to design and implement better sexual health programs in schools which will contribute towards my professional goal of improving the quality of life of students in Universities. The research training gave me the opportunity to go back and serve my local communities, which I was determined to do before applying for the grant. I am committed to action research as a result of having witnessed the economic, political and health problems of my community. My long-term career goal is to become an independent researcher and lead my own research group. This will help me to train the next generation of health care workers, scientists and contribute to science development. After finishing my master's fellowship, I straight away planned and implemented school health program with meagre resources. I was appointed as Associate Consultant in the Department of Community Health, Kabale University and this is when I realised the power and strengths of research.

Thank you to HEPI.



Dr Bahati Amon (wearing a clinical coat) Health Educating students on risky sexual behaviours, pregnancy prevention and where to report sexual abuse cases at Busanza secondary school, Kisoro district



Dr Bahati Amon (standing) health educating kinanira S.S students on STIs/AIDS Prevention

WHAT AN AMAZING OPPORTUNITY HEPI HAS GIVEN ME TO ESTABLISH FACTS ABOUT TUBERCULOSIS AMONG ADOLESCENTS

By Drazidio Judith, Master of Science in Public Health student at Clarke International University

It was in 2016 when I learnt about research methods in second year at undergraduate. I was inspired and the question I asked myself was, "how can I achieve my future career dream of being a researcher mostly in health sector? When it was time to do my research project at undergraduate, I realized that there are many topics that require research but they cannot all be done at once and requires different times, and resources. Oh what an amazing opportunity HEPI has given me to research about tuberculosis among adolescents! The issue of TB readmission /re-occurrence in Adjumani district started with patients which later turns into names and the names became people I know and later they are related to me. What came in mind was "how can I establish these facts (factors) causing TB re-occurrence among the vulnerable population? Could it be adherence issues to treatment? If yes, what factors and if no, why reoccurrence and readmission

persists among adolescents? Then, I decided to develop a concept paper on treatment adherence among adolescents and later it was approved by the faculty which gave me the opportunity to win a HEPI grant ward for my masters. Tuberculosis is considered as a disease of life style, nutrition related and as an opportunistic infection among people with chronic diseases such as HIV. The case in my community was beyond as stated above because TB infection occurs among adolescents that had never had such conditions and the question remains why? Therefore, the HEPI grant award will open windows of opportunity to venture into more research and conduct more studies on health related topics.

I am forever grateful to HEPI and Clarke International University, Institute of public Health and management for the support offered to ensure success in the completion of my Master of Science in Public Health.

God's blessings

A GREAT FOUNDATION TOWARDS RESEARCH

By Emmanuel Wasswa, Master of Public Health Monitoring and Evaluation, Year 2, Makerere University



It is a dream come true for me that HEPI-SHSSU awarded me a scholarship to complete my Master's training in Public Health Monitoring and Evaluation. It is such a privilege for me given that it came at a time when my hopes to complete my studies had greatly diminished due to financial constraints. It is humbling to experience the generous and considerate support offered through trainings. These trainings have nurtured my understanding of research, writing skills, good clinical practices and human subjects protection. With HEPI-SHSSU's multi-disciplinary approach, there is wider incorporation of health professionals

from different backgrounds contributing to all round improvement in service delivery and competency as far as answering public health problems is concerned.

I am currently working on my master's research project which aims at evaluating the progress of the new-born sickle cell screening program in Uganda and the associated challenges. New born sickle cell screening program is one of the interventions in the fight against sickle cell disease. It works by enabling identification of sickle cell disease patients early so that they can be linked to care immediately. It has been demonstrated to be effective in developed countries such as England. My study will provide relevant information concerning progress in implementation of this intervention and clear understanding of the challenges the program faces. Based on these challenges, mitigation measures can then be developed to enable success of the program.

Being a HEPI-SHSSU awardee is such an honour and privilege and therefore I am forever indebted to the HEPI-SHSSU team under the leadership of the Principal Investigator, Prof. Sarah Kiguli. I look forward to sharing my study results at scientific conferences, workshops and seminars. I also look forward to strengthening and building my carrier in research given the firm foundation bestowed upon me by this opportunity.

RESEARCHERS AND MENTORS THAT I HAVE LONG ADMIRERD THROUGH MY PROFESSIONAL JOURNEY

By Dr. Iga Kirabo, Year 3, Master of Medicine in Radiology, College of Health Sciences, Makerere University



When I learnt that I had received a HEPI Masters fellowship grant, I was overwhelmingly elated. This came at the perfect time because I was exasperated and considering giving up on carrying out my study project on non-communicable diseases (DM) due to

fiscal implications. Fortunately, I will be able to finish my training and do top-notch research on sonographic assessment of subclinical atherosclerosis among type 2 diabetes mellitus patients. The HEPI mentors have so far been very helpful and supportive of me at every stage of my research. I am closely working with researchers and mentors that I have long admired through my professional journey. I've been inspired to consider ideas in research ethics and biostatistics as a part of this process, and I think these ideas will stick with me for the remainder of my scientific career. I am appreciative of HEPI for putting me on the path of ongoing personal growth. I am eager for opportunities to participate in more training and to pass on my knowledge to upcoming generations of scientists. As part of the process, HEPI ensures to give its fellows

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research training prior to embarking on the projects. We were at various phases of our research projects at the start of the program; some had finished proposals that were ready to be submitted to the IRB or to begin data collection, while others were still at the concept stage. By the end of these meetings, “don’t be surprised if you want to ditch your project or parts of it,” said our first facilitator. Since we believed we had already invested a lot of time and effort in what we wanted to pursue or thought were “worthy” endeavours, this too seemed insurmountable. Further, when our knowledgeable facilitators walked us through each step of the research process one by one, the challenge of

conducting high-quality research looked more difficult than ever and intimidating. The assignment was to come up with a unique research question that was distinctive and beneficial to science at the same time, could endure the strict budgetary requirements, and was deserving of consideration. To say that the sessions were beneficial would be an understatement on all aspects, but they were eye-opening, provided exposure to a better grasp of different research components, and might be utilized as a launching pad for other projects in the future. I am grateful for the opportunity to learn from the superb facilitators, the research giants as well as to HEPI-SHSSU for supporting this perfectly timed training.

HEPI NURTURES THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS EDUCATION TO PROMOTE QUALITY TRAINING AT BUSITEMA UNIVERSITY FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES

*By Dr. Joseph Luwaga Mpigi, Deputy Dean,
Busitema University Faculty of Health Sciences*



Quality Assurance (QA) at Busitema University Faculty of Health Sciences (BUFHS) is primarily about ensuring that the training of tomorrow’s health workers is done according to the standards and guidelines agreed upon and embraced by the university. This view is premised on three main assumptions, namely (i) that the curricula are accredited and up-to-date (ii) participating staff are qualified and competent (iii) processes in the training are documented and disseminated to guide proper delivery/consumption of the approved curricula. Over the past 2 years, the HEPI project has been supporting efforts to establish an Education Unit at BUFHS. In November 2022, the University Senate approved the proposal to establish this unit, but after re-naming it as ‘Department of

Health Professions Education’ to align properly in the established organogram structure of the university. It is due for presentation to University Council for final approval.

Once approved, the Department of Health Professions Education (DHPE) will take charge of curricula issues at BUFHS, i.e., guidance on development of new curricula, tracking and documentation of the delivery of existing curricula, and guidance in reviewing expiring curricula. Furthermore, the DHPE will continually identify training/pedagogical gaps among faculty staff, and come up with ways of addressing them. Finally, DHPE in close collaboration with other establishments in the university will provide support to learners by way of career guidance, mentoring, etc.

Currently, the documented training processes at BUFHS range from scanty to non-existence. Thus, besides supporting the establishment of DHPE, the HEPI project has been extending a helping hand to the Faculty’s QA Committee. HEPI supported the training of members of this QA Committee. Since November 2022, HEPI is supporting the faculty QA committee in documenting processes in the training at BUFHS. The QA committee started with the assessment process and specifically, the documentation of assessing students in research training, that is, at graduate level, the development of research concept, appointment of supervisors, proposal development, proposal approval

at different levels, submission of dissertation for marking, defense and final submissions of the approved versions. Similarly, the students' research process at undergraduate level is also getting documented.

The drafted processes will be presented to the Higher Degrees Committee and to the relevant Departments

for input, and eventually to the faculty board for approval, ownership and adoption by BUFHS. Other key processes in the training at BUFHS will similarly be documented. Both the establishment of the DHPE and the documentation of the training processes at BUFHS will go a long way in promoting sustenance of quality training of health professionals at this university.

A LONG SOUGHT DOOR OPENED THROUGH HEPI-SHSSU RESEARCH GRANT

By Kanyesigye Amon, BEHS Year 2, Makerere College Of Health Sciences



All along I desired to discover an opportunity to sufficiently expose my research and data collection skills, with passion to become a great public health researcher, who will positively impact the Ugandan community and the world at large. My dream became fulfilled when I sighted a poster advertising research articles required by HEPI. This gave me a smile and joy that filled my heart because it was time to put my skills into action. After I had understood the procedures, I contacted my fellow students and formed a group of 7 people, Kanyesigye Amon, Ariho Clinton, Natukunda Juliet, Asasira Nkahebwa, Kigozi Isaac, Tumwine Jimmy and Jabim Philliam. I am so pleased with HEPI because honestly speaking, I have discovered the leadership skills that have been hidden within me all along.

We concluded with a concept about 'KNOWLEDGE OF SICKLE CELL DISEASE AND ASSOCIATED FACTORS AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT MAKERERE UNIVERSITY'. As a student who has hope in pursuing Masters in Public health research after

my first degree, this is a great milestone for my team got being part of an in-depth research training. I am so far done with the online training by professional facilitators that has given me all the necessary knowledge in developing a research proposal that will grant my research team funding. The skills and knowledge acquired at this level will enable me to contribute to the improvement of health and service delivery to the Ugandan communities. My aim is to see Ugandans and the entire world population living a better improved quality of life. Thank you HEPI for such an opportunity.

THE START OF MY JOURNEY IN MEDICAL RESEARCH

By Kasule Aiden Josephat, MBChB Year 3, Makerere University, College of Health Sciences



As a young medical student who is enthusiastic about everything that pushes my mind to think beyond the box, the notion of research has been reinforced often by my proud mother, who is also very passionate about medical research. She is not one of those well-known scientists, but what is most intriguing about her is how she goes about her profession with the knowledge that she is helping to advance the discipline of medicine. “Research is formalized curiosity,” commented one famous anthropologist. It’s purposeful prodding and probing.” I have always been curious in how specific advancements in contemporary medicine came to be, and this curiosity was only pitched by my mother’s exposure to the subject and the several research training programs I have endeavoured to attend. As I continued with my routine as a medical student in the middle of this year, I stumbled upon a HEPI advertisement for an undergraduate research training/mentorship. We had to develop a research concept. I pondered which of the listed themes would apply most to and have the greatest influence on my present community as a medical student. Fortunately, my colleagues and I narrowed our focus to HIV/AIDS. However, that wasn’t the end of the struggle; finding a specialized issue under HIV/AIDS posed new challenges.

Thankfully, or regrettably, as you may say, I had heard

tales from a number of colleagues about how they were exposed to bodily fluids like blood and needle stick injuries during their clinical rotations. As I began my third clinical rotation at Mulago National Referral Hospital in Uganda, these tales ceased to be mere tales and became something I was actually experiencing. During an operation I had the opportunity to assist in, I was exposed to blood that came dangerously close to getting in my eyes. In addition, a member of our team reported how she once became exposed while flushing a cannula belonging to a known ISS patient and had to begin HIV PEP.

Our team was able to decide on “*AWARENESS & USE OF PEP AMONG MEDICAL STUDENTS IN UGANDA*” as our topic basing on the burden of the problem in Uganda. We were lucky that our research concept was approved and that we were chosen to proceed on to the interview, which also went well.

Although eager to learn and take part in invasive operations in a hospital setting, medical students are especially susceptible to occupational exposures to blood-borne infections because of their inexperience. Only a small number of studies have looked at this issue in medical students, and even fewer have come up with suggestions for helping students at the time of exposure and motivating them to report the occurrence and get the help they need. HEPI is giving us a platform to work on this problem since the medical students of today will become the physicians of tomorrow.

MORE STEPS CLOSER TO A BETTER TOMORROW

By Mercy Takuwa, MSc. Immunology and Clinical Microbiology (MaKCHS)



I am thrilled and forever grateful to have been awarded this most gracious and prestigious grant by HEPI-SHSSU. This scholarship has given me the opportunity to complete my Master's training at Makerere University with ease and excellence. It came in at the right time and relieved me of the financial burden that was hindering my academic focus and progress. My master's research project is currently linked to the Third Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with a

target of ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic by 2030. It is specifically utilizing Plasmacytoid Dendritic cells as potential biomarkers for early detection of acute HIV-1 infection. This will potentially play a great role reducing the disease spread. Upon receipt of approval from the Research Ethics Committee, I will be able to complete this research and publish it. Because of HEPI-SHSSU, I am more than persuaded that my aspiration to become a great renowned immunology researcher and innovator will be fulfilled. The grant has also given me the chance to work together and build a network with more experienced researchers and offered me insight into research operations in immunology and molecular biology research. I am forever thankful to HEPI-SHSSU implementation team under the headship of Prof. Sarah Kiguli for this life changing scholarship.

HEPI SHSSU CHAMPIONING RESPONSE TO CHANGE IN UGANDA'S HEALTH SECTOR

By Lumu Timothy, Year 5 MBChB, Kabale University



Kabale University HEPI Research Group at Kabale District Health Offices

"Nothing is Constant, except for change"- Heraclitus of Ephesus. Change, perhaps we should be weary of change. If we had our way perhaps, we would stop it because change makes a bothersome place of a comfort zone, turns innovations to trends and finally renders them obsolete. The medical field is no exception to change. All participants fully dedicated, the microbes in developing mechanisms of evading antimicrobials, the people in

changing lifestyle which has resulted in an increase in the burden of non-communicable diseases and all this happening at once. What does change mean for us as health scientists? Change means awareness and being proactive. We do not have the luxury of waiting for the bludgeoning that comes with the randomness of change. We cannot wait for the point where previous solutions become obsolete, the consequences can be far reaching and for the most part unbearable.

Research is the one comprehensive mechanism to keep a foot ahead of or close to change. Through research, existing solutions can be assessed hence creating awareness and provoking innovation. Therefore, it is important that all people in science and especially the health field, be equipped with the skills and thoughtfulness that have come to be associated with researchers. The curiosity to ask "why?" and bravery to ask "why not?" are essential if we are to catch up with change. They are the foundation, onto

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which skills of data collection, analysis, presentation and dissemination should be built if we are to stand a chance against change. In another paradigm, research gives us the best chance of being the drivers of change controlling both direction and amplitude.

HEPI-SHSSU has provided platform for students at

my University, Kabale University, to acquire relevant skills, interact with renown researchers, provided funding and most importantly a chance to be role players in research. In mentoring young researchers, HEPI is improving Uganda's prognosis in matching up with the change.

A JOURNEY TOWARDS RESEARCH WORTH CELEBRATING

By Muruhuura Matthias, MBChB Year 2, Makerere College of Health Sciences



After joining university earlier this year, the word that kept puzzling my mind for close to 2 months was research. I came to hear about the power and importance of research on 6th February 2022. This happened following the orientation to usher us into the university. Almost every professor emphasized that being a medical practitioner and a researcher at the same time puts you at a higher level since research can be used as a tool to impact society. Being impactful towards the society has always been my passion since

childhood. With my engagement in research, I would move a step towards fulfilling my dreams as a young scientist. In March 2022, I came to identify a group of 8 fellow medical students with similar ambitions. We attended a 2-day research webinar organized by Federation of African Medical Students Association. This webinar was an eye opener for the whole team and we anticipated reaching greater heights in research. Thereafter, we attended a series of webinars week in week out where we gained a tremendous amount of knowledge. With a deep pool of knowledge but nowhere to apply it, there came a savior, HEPI. Having found us with a background of the basic research knowledge, we did not find a lot of hardship designing a research concept that was easily accepted by HEPI. Our research knowledge has intensively increased having attended a week long training program courtesy of HEPI under the guidance of Prof. Sarah Kiguli. This was very productive, I got a lot of my questions answered. Long live HEPI.

LEARNING THE ROPES WITH HEPI

By Mutuku Irene, Microbiology and Immunology Department, Kabale University School of Medicine



When the opportunity presented itself for HEPI to fund budding researchers, I was excited to apply. I had encountered HEPI in some of its previous trainings including facilitation of online training and proposal writing. The real work started after pitching the proposals and being selected where we

embarked on a rigorous training. HEPI had a very organized training structure and drew expertise from different facilitators who worked diligently to ensure that the proposal advanced from the conceptual stage to execution and could draw real life applications. We gained knowledge on how to write a proposal, draw up a realistic budget and account for it, understand the requirements from the different ethics review boards, proper data collection tools

and analyses, interpretation and dissemination of data. It was through this learning that I actually appreciated the different facades research brings in. Not only is the concept or idea important but the necessary work needed to achieve its successful implementation. It

was the meticulous nature of how HEPI handled our proposals to ensure that we execute them successfully. I now have a greater appreciation for HEPI's training as I employ the skills I acquired from the program.

A SPRINGBOARD TO RESEARCH

By Nabaasa Shivan, Year 2, Bachelor of Science in Medical Radiography, Makerere University



At the hill of endless opportunities, most students at the College of Health Sciences will tell you about HEPI as one of those opportunities most medical students both undergraduate and postgraduate are always on a look out for. I joined my Year one with great enthusiasm for research and I was always on a look out for an opportunity to take part in research and this is how I got to know about the Research and Writers' club after I had attended the SIOP conference at Serena hotel. As a student then, such an experience was a motivation to start on my research journey having realized that the abstracts presented had to have a research background. I started telling some friends in the clinical years about my passion for research and they always shared with me their experience at HEPI which made me more interested in research having learnt that it's a core skill in the field of medicine and I became more curious about this experience. Towards the end of semester one, I was part of the students' team in organizing the JASH conference. During the meetings of the organizing committee, I got to know more about HEPI, its core values and how beneficial it has been in the field of research. During our recess term, HEPI sent out a call for research teams and this was an opportunity I couldn't overlook as I was getting closer to experience what I had always heard in stories.

The story about HEPI got more interesting at the JASH conference when I saw Undergraduate students sponsored by HEPI presenting their abstracts. After

this conference, I got an idea from one of the student presenters who told me about the cohort study that has been going on at IDI for two years. She shared with me one of the contacts of the investigators of this study who gave me more details. It was from this that my team and I with help from Anna and Andrew and guidance from our mentor, Dr. Roy Mubuuke developed a secondary study; *"Prevalence of cardiac arrhythmias among people >60 years living with HIV"* We were fortunately shortlisted for the interview and later invited to take part in the training sessions on developing research proposals, writing abstracts and data collection. We are now working on the proposal and looking forward to taking on this journey with HEPI. HEPI! You've changed the stories of many students and through research and mentorship, a generation of young researchers and great leaders that will solve most the health dilemmas has been birthed. **THANK YOU HEPI.**

IMPROVING STUDENTS CARDIO-PULMONARY RESCUSCITATION SKILLS THROUGH SKILLS TRAINING WORKSHOPS: EXPERIENCES FROM A RURAL BASED MEDICAL UNIVERSITY

By Namuyimbwa Lydia, Kabale University School of Medicine



In the health professions education, it is the role of the medical educators to nurture and transform medical students into competent health workers who are in position to physically assess, examine and diagnose patients. These skills can only be harnessed if the component of clinical skills training is incorporated into these students' curriculum. It should therefore be mandatory for all medical students to acquire these skills as they go through their training so that the theory component of the curriculum is well aligned with the practicum in order to produce competent graduate health professions. We set to evaluate the effectiveness of a clinical skills training workshop on students' cardio-pulmonary resuscitation skills.

A two-day workshop was organized under the auspices of the HEPI Project. A total of 40 Year V students were trained on cardio-pulmonary resuscitation skills. The workshop was facilitated by a team of visiting doctors from University of Slovenia and teaching faculty from Kabale University School of Medicine. The students

were divided into small groups and they were able to demonstrate the cardio-pulmonary lifesaving technique using the provided mannequins under the supervision of the faculty and the visiting doctors.

The need for clinical skills training workshops is fundamental in the training of medical students in the health professions programmes as the students were able to demonstrate the attained cardio-pulmonary resuscitation skills during the training workshop. Therefore, continued clinical skills training for medical students could be vital in order to improve students' clinical skills during their training and also transform them into competent health professionals.

MY RESEARCH JOURNEY AT THE COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES

By Nandera Ketra Venesa, MBChB, Year 2 Makerere College of Health Sciences



Dressed in a clinical white coat is Nandera Ketra Venesa at a medical camp in Katanga that was organized as a way of giving back to the community

It is a pleasure and one of the greatest opportunities I have got in life, to serve others. One of the things I have always loved to do in life since childhood is research. From when I started hearing about research in my primary school up-to date, the love and passion for it keeps increasing. Unfortunately, I loved something I had not understood entirely, but thanks to HEPI I can

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now fully do it. At first, all I knew was to sit, think and get a problem facing people and ask myself a number of questions and I actually thought that was what research was about. I didn't realize the depths and inner work that people go through to bring out the articles that we all love reading and commenting about. HEPI has given me that chance, to get to know what research is, why it is important, how I can actually be part of it and achieve my goals in that field. Great thanks to the sessions given to us by HEPI, I can now understand how deep and interesting the whole research process can be.

As a pre-clinical undergraduate student, I always thought it's impossible to have research done and published at my level. It was always something so big and out of reach. However, something that HEPI has taught me is that everything in research is possible and that I can do it. Research is a field that can help us as individuals and also widely in our community as well as the whole world. I would like to encourage each and every one out there especially undergraduate students to take up these opportunities in research and utilize them to the maximum. A lot can be achieved through this and we can prevent a number of issues especially health related in our areas. A good example is our team. Our research is about sickle cell disease and we hope and know that the results we get will be of great importance to us, the policy makers and the community at large.

The research you conduct can be used by the policy makers to make better policies for the betterment of our country.

One other thing that I have come to learn throughout this journey is that we need each other in every aspect of life. The research ideas, the data collection, each and everything only comes out when you do it with a team. The team builds you individually. I have personally benefited a lot from team work. It has made me a better person. Having a mentor is one other chance and great experience I have had. Someone who guides you at every step you take, not letting you go astray. Thanks to HEPI for always providing the beneficiaries with mentors because this helps us grow into better researchers and human beings. We get to learn from the experienced people. Lastly, I would like to thank HEPI for the opportunity, the chance it gives to a number of people me inclusive to attain greater knowledge in the research field. They have laid a foundation for us to build something great. Being my first time to go through the HEPI training this year has been a blessing to me. The training topics we covered were relevant including: What research is all about, the research history, how to generate a good and applicable research question, how to write a problem statement, coming up with objectives and also talk to other people about our research ideas and get their views.

LEVERAGED PARTNERSHIP WITH HEPI

By Ndungutse Reuben, Master of Public Health, Clarke International University



A maternity ward at Kitwe Health Centre IV

It was a very exciting moment when I received good news of scholarship offer including both tuition and research by HEPI-SHSSU. This was after the COVID

19 outbreak that all my hopes to finish a Master's of Public Health at Clarke International University (CIU) was gone as there was economic and social disruption caused by the COVID 19 pandemic. This would derail all my aspirations to conduct research on caesarean delivery among women of reproductive age with in Ntungamo district. My motive was to have a deeper understanding of why the C-section is frequently performed. Many women were getting out of their normal shape after caesarean delivery, others were limited to a number of children which is against their wish and there were reported death as results of poor C-section. I had developed the idea of helping others as part of a resourceful life and this had to start with the community and the people I lived with for so many years, such that they can find happiness and fulfilment. Ntungamo is a district in south western

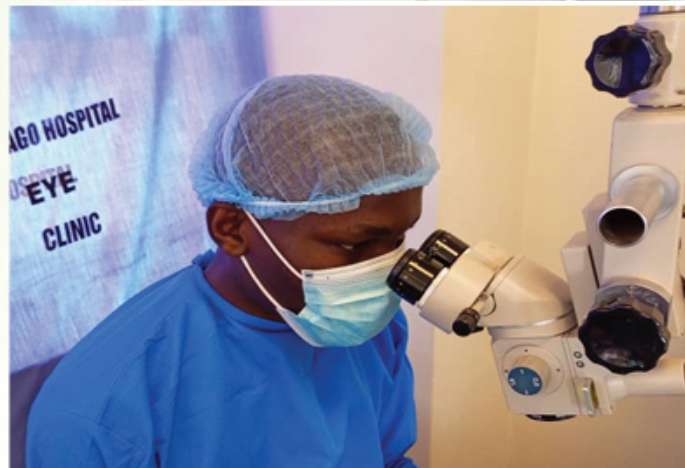
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Uganda with a population of about 15,000 people, with very few having access to social services like education, medical care, transportation among others. The people's ray of hope is based in politicians who can move among others the motion aimed at improving health care systems at the floor of the parliament and the few people in the area who are educated because they will get jobs and become policy makers and they will be considerate of their area on the favourable policies that will revamp the health care systems. And my contribution to the area started with carrying out

research on factors associated with caesarean delivery among women of reproductive age and I very much thank HEPI for the grant she has given me to facilitate all my activities and the inspiring research methodology training I got from HEPI has enhanced my practice as a research fellow. I hope to publish the findings and I have much hope that the results of my research will be the basis for planning C-section in order to address my people's health needs. Therefore, I thank you HEPI for the great work you are doing in education sector and I attribute my overall success to you.

DREAM MADE POSSIBLE BY HEPI-SHSSU

Dr. Otim Ambrose, Resident, Ophthalmology, Makerere College of Health Sciences.



Dr. Otim examining a patient in Mulago Eye Clinic & doing a pterygium surgery in minor procedure room

Imagine a mother of 4 children being guided with a stick by her 4-year-old son, a child born with cataracts becoming permanently blind, the ordeal of a retired teacher who has served for over 30 years but now cannot read anymore. What about a future doctor or engineer at age of 5 unable to attend school

or learn because she lacks proper eye glasses that can correct her vision? I encountered such people as a general practitioner in an upcountry health center IV and the best course of management was referral to a bigger hospital which was more than 200 km with one ophthalmologist in the whole region. This experience sparked off a dream to pursue ophthalmology to serve and provide eye care services. Leaving my formal employment to pursue the dream in ophthalmology seemed almost impossible but necessary at the time. Some of the challenges that made the dream almost impossible at the time were financial difficulties, fear to do research and learning the totally new clinical skills that were different from the major four disciplines of my medical practice. The dream became possible when I applied to HEPI-HSSU for support. Thankfully, I was interviewed and awarded with fellowship support to complete my final year and research.

With the highly interactive mentorship program and trainings in research that HEPI-SHSSU experts offer to both undergraduates and postgraduates, I was able to overcome the phobia of doing research. I am currently finalizing my research project titled "Ocular findings, prevalence of visual impairment and associated factors among patients with chronic kidney disease at Kiruddu National Referral Hospital". As I conclude my training, I must say I have become a better doctor and researcher who is looking forward to train, supervise and mentor others in both ophthalmology and research. I look forward to continued learning and growth with aim of serving Ugandans and patients in regions that don't have easy access to proper eye care services provided by a specialist in ophthalmology. Thank you to HEPI-SHSSU and the Department of Ophthalmology for making this possible.

UNLEASHING MY POTENTIAL IN A JOURNEY OF A FUTURE RESEARCHER: ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF ANTENATAL CARE SERVICES AND RELATED FACTORS AT KABALE RRH

By Phionah Ainomugisha, MPH Kabale University



The existence of maternal health services does not guarantee their use by women. Neither does the use of maternal health services guarantee optimal outcomes for women and thus the continuously escalating maternal mortality globally, and most especially in low and middle income countries. To address this problem, maternal mortality has been included in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). An important aspect of care that has been highlighted to explain why women either do not access services at all, access them late or suffer an avoidable adverse outcome, despite timely presentation, relates to the intangible concept of quality (both perceived and technical) of care. As long as avoidable maternal deaths and morbidity continue to occur that can at least in part, be attributed to poor quality care, there is a need for researchers to establish the level of quality of health services received by mothers during their journey of pregnancy (both perceived and technical). Knowing the level of quality of care is an essential component of any programme that upholds the basic principles of a reproductive health approach.

A woman's experience of care for antenatal care (ANC) services is likely to influence her future health seeking behaviour. It is conceivable that after experiencing good but disrespectful treatment in a previous ANC visit, a woman with a complication may delay accessing care from a facility that provides essential ANC of technically high quality in favour of staying at home a little longer or travelling slightly further to a unit where the perceived, though not necessarily technical, ANC is of a higher standard. The relationships are complex. What needs to be understood is that while the availability of appropriate essential ANC and other obstetric services

is the only way to prevent a complication ending into a death among mothers, the quality of care provided and experienced in ANC visits may impact negatively on overall outcomes if the timing of use is delayed as a result of poor perceived standards of care. An assessment of quality must necessarily conceptualize the various components of care as interdependent.

From the preamble above, if I can add any informative information to maternal health, it is through research. Throughout my journey as a masters student, I have appreciated the fact that research is intellectually challenging but with worthy outcomes. Credit goes to HEPI masters fellowship that I got to know about through the HoD, Community Health at Kabale University who encouraged all the students to apply. With an interest in maternal health, I applied for the programme and fortunately was among the awardees. As a female and a mother in making, I believe that establishing the root cause of challenges often provides more sustainable solutions and thus adopting the same belief to come up with resourceful information that could act as a spring board for policy and guideline makers and amenders in addressing maternal health challenges in the country which in the long run will reduce the high maternal death in my region. This masters fellowship programme has truly become my voice and enabler in adding my voice to those of the many outside there in a study titled "Assessing the quality of antenatal care services and related factors at Kabale RRH" and broadened my knowledge and understanding in the area of maternal health. With a series of research seminars received from HEPI-SHSSU, I now ably write, carryout, present and yet to publish my research findings (still ongoing) and now a wonderful and outstanding researcher.

Forever grateful!

THE WHOLE OF SCIENCE IS NOTHING MORE THAN A REFINEMENT OF EVERYDAY THINKING

By *Safari Daniel, Year 4 Medical Laboratory student, Clarke International University*



Safari, on the left hand side during the data collection process

At a very tender age, I used to walk with my big brother Samson who used to show me different insects and worms which we later played with. This stirred and infused an insatiable curiosity for science and research in me, I really wanted to find out more of the why and how these adorable creatures survive. My passion for science and research continued to blossom, especially when I got to the university where everything started to make sense in terms of the interdisciplinary nature of cell, molecular biology and genetics because they all formed a combination of my two favorite subjects: biology and chemistry, into a unique and multifaceted field. The passion for research has always pushed me to

go an extra mile to search for knowledge and making it available for people. In 2020, I designed my own website called SAFARI MEDICAL RESEARCH CENTRE.

I always wanted to carry out my own research in order to satisfy the hunger within me but then there was no opportunity for me to do it. Luckily enough in 2021, I came across an advert by HEPI-SHSSU concerning an opportunity for a research grant. I never thought twice about this, I clearly knew this was meant for me, and yes I grabbed it with two hands.

I appreciate the HEPI-SHSSU for nourishing the passion of research in me and without them I would not be this person that I am today. The HEPI-SHSSU not only funded my research but also gave me a chance to learn more of research through the resourceful research fellowship week I had with their facilitators. I am currently doing data analysis of the research titled: *Assessment of the knowledge and attitude towards antibiotic resistance among people residing in Namuwongo, Makindye east division Kampala, Uganda*. I am looking forward to publishing it sooner. *It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts*, By [Conan Doyle](#). HEPI-SHSSU has made sure we don't make this capital mistake. Am more than grateful!

MY ROAD TO RESEARCH- A REASON TO DREAM

By *Sanjanaa Srikant MBChB and Surgery, Year 4, Makerere College of Health Sciences*



I am Sanjanaa Srikant a 4th year doing Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBChB) at Makerere University and a Principal Investigator of the HEPI funded study on *Exploring Covid-19 Vaccine Hesitancy among Makerere University Medical Students and Katanga Community Residents*. With a childhood dream of growing into a Doctor and an aspiring researcher in the near future, I have always wished to serve the society at my best.

My goal is to make a difference in the community with better health care professionals to promote health equity

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in education and health care through intercultural and multidisciplinary collaboration with a goal of stepping towards a better universal health care system. Here I am today moving a step closer with my passion towards research. HEPI was the first grant that I had won and it always will have a special place in my heart and I would therefore like to extend my sincere gratitude to the entire HEPI team and program for making a dream come true. What is more of this initiative is the prospect to exchange knowledge and in the long term I also hope to attain a long lasting collaboration with the program coordinators, mentors and other members to have a continuous exchange of knowledge and share interests in the medical field over time. With the idea of bringing

together such great minds, opens the possibility of promoting network growth. Starting from the research training, being part of a mentorship program, writing a proposal, getting the IRB approval, to collecting data and analysing, my team and I have come a long way through. Not only have we been equipped with knowledge and interpersonal skills, but also learnt what it means to be called a researcher. I have now published many other research works as well as won other grants and HEPI has been my foundation to all my achievements. I believe our research will help in developing and improving our health care system and influence policy implementation at both national and international level thus improving quality of life.

HEPI – THE SCIENTIFIC MENTOR

By Timothy Isaac Ochola – Biomedical Science student, Makerere College of Health Science



I call it THE SCIENTIFIC MENTOR because in the world of science, HEPI deserves the phrase in 2 Timothy 4:7 “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” Personally, HEPI has transformed me from the research dreamer I was to the research addict I am becoming. In my book (yet to be published) entitled *OVERCOMING NEGATIVITY IN LIFE*, I mentioned;

“It has become a habit that we wait for new ideas and conclusions from external sources without attempting to do it by self. We are conditioned to think they are worth exploiting and we are worth waiting for the outcome of their innovations. We are so fast at believing in our limitations and so slow in realizing the possibilities. We have plenty of medicinal plants, minerals and resources but we are not interested in exploring them. Instead, we wait to be told about their benefits by external

experts. We have so many unexplored possibilities we have ignored. Often times without even giving an attempt, we think we can't. How do we get convinced that we can't when we haven't even tried anyway?”

As a writer and author, these words sink deep and wake me up when I read them, and HEPI has been and is still the practical version of these wake-up reminders. Indeed, HEPI is the physical evidence revealing that together we can transform our nations by thinking out loud and executing the potential in us as we put our minds at work. As a knowledge-thirsty medical student, I cherished research, and I enjoyed reading scientific literature with facts and new information; the sweet taste of knowledge ran down my spine like honey from a comb as I read through medical journals and articles. I always admired to be a part of the knowledge fountain from which such interesting research knowledge flows, but because research takes a lot of sacrifice, time and energy, paying this price lengthened the distance between fantasy and reality: and so the outcome of this does relate to our comfort in waiting for new ideas instead of innovating them.

Thanks to HEPI that when it sent out notice calling for applications from students interested in learning more about research, it acted as a shield of faith against the doubt in me. I contacted my mentor Dr. Beatrice Achan who fully supported and mentored (and still

does) me throughout the process. In fact, through her, I have learnt practical skills and I am inspired to be a blossoming product of her mentorship and provide the same support to those I meet along my career path. In spite of the fact that I was nervous to present my proposal entitled *Correlation of oxidative stress resistance and fluconazole resistance of Cryptococcus neoformans among HIV/AIDS patients at the Infectious Diseases Institute*, I put in great effort and left the rest to the panelists, who gave positive feedback, commenting that my proposal was a very interesting one. I have since then developed an intrinsic motivation to research and I am working around the clock and in the laboratory in a bid to dig new information with regards to my research proposal. Since clinical mycologists are involved in patient care in resource limited settings where fluconazole monotherapy is the mainstay treatment

for Cryptococcal Meningitis (CM), I look forward to an outcome that will directly benefit patient care and further research on CM in Uganda. Through HEPI, my exposure in the field of research is teaching me that researchers have a habit of star-bursting for solutions to current global problems and challenges, a good addiction which I am developing.

On the other hand, I was able to extend my socio-professional world by getting to work together with Prof. David Meya of IDI Mulago who is very supportive, among other scientists in the field of research. Thank you HEPI for your transformational initiative which is pulling students' potentials from the pit of negativity into the world of endless possibilities. Someday I will look down from the top of a mountain and say; **this potential was ignited as a flickering light by HEPI – the scientific mentor**”.

MY HORIZON TO HEPI – SHSSU GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

By Topher Mugisha, MPH Student Kabale School of Medicine



HEPI scholarship opportunity came in September beginning of year two in my first semester 2022. Honestly, I had reached on break-even point for clearing my 2nd year tuition and research facilitation. With my nuclear family of 5 members and 2 other adopted children where everybody goes to school coupled with the current prevailing economic stress; I was in the process to sacrifice by dropping out of the program for a dead year but still dwelling longer in denial stage with positive mental attitude. I applied to HEPI for merit like other Ugandans on 30th September 2022 and received an invitation

letter for the interviews on 8th October 2022 and this was sincerely unbelievable! This is an email that I read over and over recurring times! I attended the interviews still in a shock of good news, on 11th November 2022; I received the Award Letter from Prof. Sarah Kiguli, Grant No. IR25TW011213 accompanied with the program for the research training. Am so grateful for the coming of HEPI which has reduced my pressure now, am able to see green light, bright future of building a smile on my face, by restoring hope on my way! So far so good, am very impressed with the recent concluded research training by an expertise unique HEPI team which has made my dream career to reality with soft expected landing, life cannot be the same again. I had contacted many academicians for research support to bring me on board but all have been in vain. All along, I have been felt cheated for the 20 years down the road in HIV/AIDS world practice without any contribution to the published information. HEPI accepted my request and has given me this golden opportunity to explore my heights in both capacity building and financial support to fulfill my dream. Am so humbled and honored to be part of HEPI – SHSSU family, together we share the challenge!

THE EXCITING AND AMAZING DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

By Twinomuhwezi Elam, Bachelor of Science
in Medical Radiography, Makerere University,
College of Health Sciences



It was after drafting the research proposal of our project titled “*Status of Utilization of Radiology Information Systems in selected hospitals in Kampala*” that we had to seek approval from the Mulago Research and Ethics Committee (MHREC) which we successfully obtained. After attainment of the approval, our next move was to have data collected. As a team, we had to make a careful choice of hospitals from where we were to collect the data. After selection of the hospitals, the next assignment

was to assign each team member a given number of hospitals from where to get the data. The process of data collection was very interesting and fun as the respondents were very welcoming and easily availed the required information as pertains the study. Some respondents who were found busy at the health facilities accepted to provide information by email through responding to electronic questionnaires. The exciting part of it was us having an electronic questionnaire, something we had not done before. Interacting with programs like “*Enketo*” eased the designing of the questionnaire and getting feedback from respondents. This became a new experience and research skill obtained. The teamwork and collaboration made the whole process a success as it prepared us for the TUFH (Towards Unity For Health) Regional Virtual Conference where we presented the abstract for our research project. Thank you HEPI Team for the sacrifice, mentorship and training you offered to enhance our research skills. “*Asante sana, Mweebale munoonga, Mweebale nnyo, Apwoyo Matek*”

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