



American International Health Alliance
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AIHA Country Snapshot: South Africa

SUMMER 2012

AIHA PARTNERSHIPS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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

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HIV/AIDS Twinning Center Partnerships in South Africa

South Africa is home to a racially and culturally diverse population of 48.8 million people, including 5.6 million people living with HIV. According to a study conducted by the South African Department of Health in 2009, the national HIV prevalence rate is 29.4 percent, with rates ranging from around 17 percent to nearly 40 percent depending on the province. A sharp rise of multi-drug resistant TB among HIV patients poses a significant threat and has prompted national efforts to integrate treatment for HIV, TB, STIs, and other communicable diseases. A severe lack of trained medical providers, particularly in rural areas of the country, also represents a significant challenge to the country's health system. With support from the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the US Government team in country, the HIV/AIDS Twinning Center currently manages four partnerships in South Africa, including three university-to-university alliances that focus on strengthening a new bachelor's program that is preparing Clinical Associates, a new mid-level cadre of healthcare professionals that is helping to bring skilled care providers to areas of the country that need them most.

Strengthening Clinical Associates Programs

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

AIHA/South Africa

The HIV/AIDS Twinning Center

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recommendations that promote the Clinical Associates profession in South Africa. As of July 2012, some key accomplishments of this partnership include conducting faculty development workshops for clinical preceptors and procurement of clinical simulation equipment to assure improved student training experiences. Partners participated in the AIHA-sponsored Clinical Associates Forum and Health Professions Education Meeting conducted in mid-2011. They drafted evaluation protocols for a clinical site survey, working closely with two volunteers placed onsite by AIHA in late 2011 through the Volunteer Healthcare Corps (VHC). The volunteers conducted a faculty development survey, helped develop research protocols, and co-wrote a grant application to secure funding that would support further expansion of WSU's Clinical Associates Program. AIHA placed a research coordinator onsite in May 2012 to help manage data collection activities by developing a database to track program graduates; this staff member will also support implementation of a program evaluation with technical support from the US partners. Additionally, AIHA is supporting expanded use of evidence-based medical resources at WSU through its Learning Resources Project (LRP).



Clinical Associates training at all three universities places a strong focus on acquisition of practical skills with the majority of study being done at clinical placement sites, most in underserved rural areas of South Africa.

The University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and Emory University have been working together since mid-2010. Faculty and staff development plays an important role in this partnership, as does strengthening student assessment and learning opportunities. Partners are also working to support research and program assessment capabilities at Wits, as well as to build capacity on advocacy and marketing of the Clinical Associates profession. Key accomplishments to date include conducting faculty development workshops for teaching staff, as well as clinical preceptors at district hospitals. Emory partners served as external examiners for final examinations at Wits and assisted with setting third-year learning objectives. They also shared test questions from the Emory Physician Assistant Program, helped develop the Clinical Associates National Exam, and participated in the graduation ceremony for the first cohort of Wits students. To support Clinical Associates as they begin their practice in Northwest Province, experts from Emory trained district hospital managers on key supervision, evaluation, and feedback skills. Together, partners are also planning the upcoming "International Academy of Physician Associate Educators," an event that will bring together representatives from mid-level medical training programs around the globe to share best practices. AIHA is continuing its efforts to improve access to evidence-based clinical resources at Wits, and for Clinical Associates and students at their placement sites, through its LRP.

AIHA established its third Clinical Associates partnership in early 2011. The University of Pretoria and Arcadia University are working together to strengthen Pretoria's Clinical Associates Program by developing a tracking system to ensure that students at all 18 training sites are receiving adequate training hours and similar breadth of patient types. They are also collaborating to improve both formative and summative student assessments, as well as to design and carry out a Clinical Associates Program evaluation. To this end, some key accomplishments include developing a revised student log book and improving data collection methods. The Arcadia partners contributed test questions for Pretoria's exams, acted as external examiners during finals, and helped celebrate the graduation of Pretoria's first cohort of Clinical Associates in April 2012. Partners also participated in the development of the Clinical Associates National Exam and are currently working to develop an Honor's Course that would allow students to pursue more in-depth study in disciplines such as infectious diseases or maternal and child health. Four faculty from Pretoria attended the 2011 Physician Assistant Education Association Conference, where they attended skills-building sessions on topics including test question development and other key topics. Two Pretoria students were also given the opportunity to learn from Arcadia faculty and students, along with practicing Physician Assistants, during an exchange in Delaware. As with the other two partnerships, AIHA is improving access to learning resource materials at rural rotation sites and helped establish a Clinical Learning Center at Tembisa Hospital, a main teaching site for Pretoria's Clinical Associate students. The center features computer tablets pre-loaded with medical databases and simulation equipment.

