

Establishing a HIV vaccine research unit from scratch: The Walter Sisulu University experience

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South Africa with about 6.4 million people living with HIV infection to date has the highest number of people living with HIV in the world. Various strategies have been adopted by the country in response to the pandemic. The search for an effective, relevant and affordable vaccine against HIV is one. Indeed South Africa is at the forefront of HIV Vaccine research. It has produced the first candidate HIV vaccine in the third world. Various institutions are involved in HIV Vaccine research in the country. The latest HIV Vaccine research unit to be established is Walter Sisulu HIV Vaccine Research Unit, located in the city of Mthatha in the Eastern Cape Province. It is the only research unit of its kind in the Province. The research unit was inaugurated by the Medical Research Council in 2006. While the idea of an HIV Vaccine Research Unit was well received by the stakeholders i.e., Walter Sisulu University, the Department of Health and the local community, acquiring the necessary resources was a huge challenge. It was only when The Italian Institute of Health through a program of corporation between the governments of Italy and South Africa that the dream of establishing the research unit was accomplished in 2011. The research Unit has a Laboratory, pharmacy, offices, consulting rooms, data storage room housed within the Clinical Research Unit, the relevant staff and a well sensitised population. It is open to the world for HIV Vaccine and related research.

Biography

Jimmy Chandia graduated as a Medical Doctor at Makerere University in Uganda in 1979. He specialised in Family Medicine at the Medical University of South Africa in 1990. He is currently the Principal Investigator for Walter Sisulu University HIV Vaccine Research Unit and an Associate Professor of Family Medicine in South Africa. His interest in HIV dates back to 1985 when he was involved in establishing the prevalence of HIV in South Africa. He has published in reputed journals and presented papers at national and international conferences. He is on the Editorial board of the *South African Family Practice Journal*.

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