

TRAINING HEALTHCARE WORKERS IN AFRICA

A good doctor is hard to find, especially in Africa. Although it bears 24% of the global disease burden, Africa has only 3% of the world's healthcare workers. To address this issue, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) will provide \$130 million over five years to African institutions in twelve countries. This new program, the Medical Education Partnership Initiative (MEPI), provides funding to help train 140,000 new Africa-based healthcare workers and improve medical education across the continent.

The new University of Botswana School of Medicine (UBSOM), the first medical school in the country, has been awarded a MEPI grant of about \$2 million a year for five years. The money could not have come at a better time. UBSOM, which just welcomed its second class, is busy developing curricula and constructing



Healthcare workers in Botswana

facilities. Partnering with the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) and the University of Pennsylvania (Penn), the School of Medicine now has funding to offer public health training, to strengthen mentoring to students and residents, and to provide continuing medical education to clinicians and faculty.

By collaborating with well-known institutions like Harvard and Penn, UBSOM can offer affiliated appointments that will help attract and retain talented faculty members and establish a rigorous academic environment. "The partnership is not about bringing Africans to U.S. institutions, but rather about strengthening African institutions," said Dr. Richard Marlink, Executive Director of the Harvard AIDS Initiative, who is leading HSPH's involvement.

Botswana's new School of Medicine will help improve the country's capacity to deliver healthcare. At the same time, the MEPI-funded programs will encourage young doctors and nurses to remain in Botswana, counteracting the exodus of healthcare workers who often leave for more lucrative positions in the West and elsewhere.

"We are building on lessons that the AIDS crisis taught us in Botswana and in Africa," said Marlink. "MEPI represents a long-term commitment to train and to improve the human infrastructure. And that long-term investment will improve the overall health of the people in Botswana and the region." ●



Photo by Graham Clark



**Alexander
McCall
Smith**

Alexander McCall Smith is the author of the acclaimed *No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* series, which has been translated into 45 languages and sold over 20 million copies worldwide. He was born in what is now Zimbabwe and was educated there and in Scotland.

For many years he was Professor of Medical Law at the University of Edinburgh, where he is now professor emeritus. In the 1980s he returned to Africa for several years to help establish a law school at the University of Botswana.

In addition to his university work, McCall Smith served for four years as the Vice Chairman of the Human Genetics

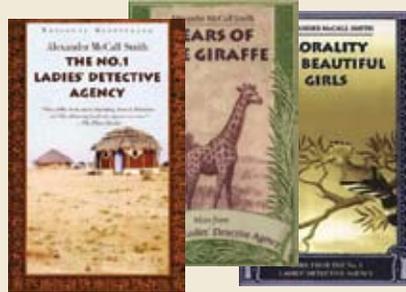
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Commission of the U.K., the Chairman of the *British Medical Journal* Ethics Committee, and a member of the International Bioethics Commission of UNESCO.

McCall Smith answered questions from *Spotlight* Editor Martha Henry, just as the twelfth book in the *No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* series hit bookstores.

Your *No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency* series is set in Botswana, a country that has the second highest HIV prevalence in the world. As a writer, you made a conscious choice not to feature the AIDS epidemic in your books. Can you briefly explain why?

MCCALL SMITH: I do make occasional mention of the AIDS epidemic in my Botswana books, but only very gently. There is more than one reason for this approach. There is a tendency on the part of outsiders who write about sub-Saharan Africa to pathologize the place. This means that they dwell on the negative and thereby convey a very one-sided impression of Africa. I do not wish to do that. If I had mentioned AIDS more frequently, the books could have become tragedies, which was certainly



not my intention. I think, too, that when dealing with the pain of others one has to be very careful. People do not wish to be portrayed as sick or infectious, and I do not wish to portray them in that way. AIDS is part of the reality of life in Botswana, but there is far more to the country than that.

The *Saturday Big Tent Wedding Party*, your most recent book in the series, is dedicated to Max Essex, Chair of the Harvard AIDS Initiative and the Botswana Harvard AIDS Institute Partnership. The dedication reads, "This book is for Professor Max Essex of the Harvard AIDS Initiative, in admiration of the work that he has done." Do you think readers will make the explicit link between AIDS and Botswana or am I reading too much into that?

MCCALL SMITH: I think that readers will assume that Professor Essex has made a great contribution to Botswana.

You have been a frequent visitor to Botswana since 1981. Has the HIV/AIDS epidemic changed your view of the country?

MCCALL SMITH: No, my view of Botswana has not been changed by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. I think that the essential nature of the country has remained constant, even in the face of this appalling tragedy.

Most Americans who know anything about Botswana probably know about it because of your books. Is that an odd responsibility for you?

MCCALL SMITH: I am very conscious of the fact that many Americans form their impression of Botswana from my books and I do feel a sense of responsibility for that. I feel that I must do two things: I must portray Botswana in a careful fashion and I must make sure that I do not mislead my readers. I think my readers understand that I concentrate on the good facets of the country rather than on its problems. These problems are referred to, but I do not put them center stage and I think my readers understand why that is so. ●

spotlight

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THE RETURN OF NEO TAPELA

Neo Tapela was born in 1980 at Princess Marina Hospital, or Marina as the locals call it, the largest public hospital in Botswana. When she was 14, the aunt who raised her was diagnosed with breast cancer at Marina. The hospital did not have sufficient oncology services, so her aunt had to travel four hours by car to South Africa for surgery and chemotherapy treatments. She later died at Marina.

The experience made the teenage Tapela want to become a doctor. She did well in school and received a scholarship to attend Milton Academy in the U.S. She went on to Wellesley College, where she majored in Biological Sciences and African Studies.

In her sophomore year, Tapela sent an email to Max Essex asking about the Botswana Harvard AIDS Institute Partnership (BHP). They met for just ten minutes, but Tapela left Essex's office with a BHP summer internship. "It was immediately clear that Neo was energetic and bright," said Essex. "She was going to do great things. I just wanted to steer her to AIDS research and back to Botswana."

Working as a lab assistant in Gaborone, she processed specimens for HIV tests and got a direct look at the effect of HIV in Botswana. "Seeing nearly 50% of those plates turning pink, which indicated a



Tapela calls on patients in Lesotho.

positive result, left an indelible mark," said Tapela. "Frankly, it traumatized me, but also solidified my commitment to working in health to serve my people."

Tapela arrived at Harvard Medical School in 2002. Over the next eight years, she learned medicine in state-of-the-art teaching hospitals in Boston, but also found time to return frequently to Africa. In the summer of 2003 she worked for Botswana's new national HIV/AIDS treatment program at Marina. She returned again in 2005 for a rotation in the internal medicine ward. During her residency years, she worked for Partners In Health in Haiti, Lesotho, and Rwanda. She also completed an internship at the World Health Organization in Geneva and earned an MPH in Clinical Effectiveness at the Harvard School of Public Health.

And true to her teenage commitment, Dr. Tapela recently returned to work in Botswana. She teaches at the newly established University of Botswana School of Medicine (UBSOM). She also serves as an attending physician at Marina and is engaged in hospital-wide initiatives for quality improvement.

At Marina, the staff is stretched, supplies are often out of stock, broken equipment goes unrepaired, and clean

linens are not always available. "All that being said, these are universal frustrations in resource-limited settings," said Tapela. Her experiences in working throughout Africa are helpful. "You can be successful in making changes because you've seen what's been done in other places. You have the perspective that this problem is shared in many different facilities."

More than 50% of patients admitted to Marina are HIV positive. Tapela is interested in exploring the links between HIV and non-communicable diseases. She is the Principal Investigator on a study examining the role of HIV as an independent risk factor for stroke in Botswana. Dr. Shahin Lockman, her mentor at the Harvard AIDS Initiative, said, "I am unfailingly impressed by Neo's intelligence, compassion, and capacity to achieve progress on multiple fronts. She's a star."

It hasn't been all work. This February Tapela married a fellow doctor who works as the Country Director in Rwanda for Partners In Health. The traditional Botswana wedding process, according to Tapela, is a long and arduous one, taking up to a year of meetings, negotiations and a good measure of drama. "My family gave the groom's family a bit of a hard time,

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Photo by Dr. Mimi Sedio



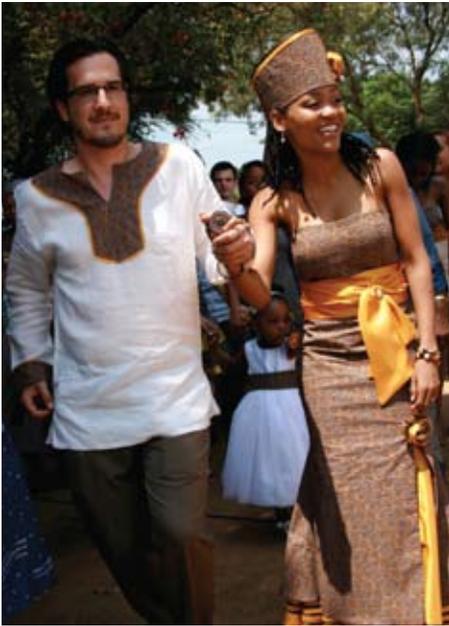
Tapela examines a patient at Princess Marina Hospital.

Profile: Dr. Neo Tapela

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which is expected!" she laughs. There was an exchange of gifts, including eight cows, and plenty of dancing and ululation.

"Our jobs are both very demanding," says Tapela. "We are definitely in the process of trying to figure out how to, first of all, live in the same country and to find that balance between career and family."



Tapela and her husband on their wedding day

Right now Tapela is busy seeing patients, teaching students, and developing curriculum for the new medical school. She is happy to be home and enjoys spending time with friends and family. "I have so many years of catching up to do," she says.

She sees herself as a global health clinician with particular identification with Africa as a whole. In the future she hopes to contribute to health systems policy in Africa.

"There is no way a daughter of a single mother of lower middle class background in Botswana would end up where I am today just through intrinsic talents or what have you," she said. "I have been tremendously blessed and with that comes a responsibility to make the best use of the opportunities that I've been given." ●

H A I N E W S

AIDS@30

To mark the 30th anniversary of the AIDS epidemic, the Harvard School of Public Health is convening a major international symposium. The two-day event, *AIDS@30: Engaging to End the Epidemic*, begins on World AIDS Day, December 1, at Harvard University. *AIDS@30* will bring together several hundred global leaders in medicine, science, arts, advocacy, public health and government. Participants will engage in a series of panel discussions and interactive events. The meeting will foster a rigorous and productive dialogue about what we have learned over the past three decades and how we can apply those lessons to end the epidemic.



Unity Dow

Unity Dow made *Newsweek's* list of 150 *Women Who Shape the World*. Noted for being Botswana's first female High Court justice and an author whose books deal with topics including HIV/AIDS and violence against women, Dow was joined by other notables including Hillary Clinton, Aung San Suu Kyi, Christiane Amanpour, and Salma Hayek.



Unity Dow

Richard Holbrooke

We sadly note the passing in December of former Ambassador to the United Nations Richard Holbrooke. He received the HAI Leadership Award in 2000 for initiating the first ever U.N. session to address AIDS, not only as a health crisis, but also as a security threat affecting every person around the world. His commitment led to a broader level of support for research and inspired increased compassion for people living with HIV.

Mochudi Prevention Project Logo Contest

To help foster community involvement with the Mochudi Prevention Project (MPP), children from local schools were asked to design a logo. The MPP is a comprehensive, community-based approach to HIV prevention being conducted in the Botswana village of Mochudi, where about 25% of adults are HIV positive.

The contest awards ceremony was held at the Phuthadikobo Museum in Mochudi. Ofentse Kgari won the competition. Visit our website, www.aids.harvard.edu, to see more entries. ●



Above: Ofentse Kgari, contest winner
Below: Winning entry



HSPH DEAN AND DELEGATION VISIT AFRICA

Julio Frenk, Dean of the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH), visited Tanzania and Botswana this February, accompanied by David Hunter, Dean for Academic Affairs, and a number of distinguished visitors.

The delegation arrived first in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, where HSPH Professor Wafaie Fawzi has conducted clinical trials and pioneered nutritional interventions to improve the quality of life for HIV/AIDS patients, pregnant women and children.

Dean Frenk and others met privately with Tanzania's President Jakaya Kikwete. The entire delegation participated in a ceremony at the construction site for the Mnazi Mmoja Center for Excellence in

HIV Care and Education, a project that will eventually house a new clinic and training center.

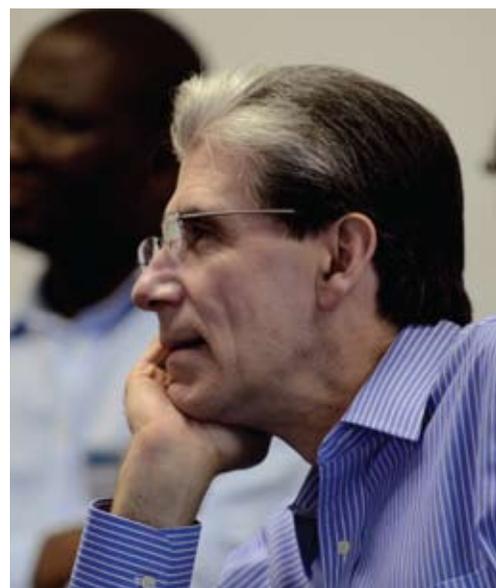
"It was an exhilarating and illuminating experience for Irene and me to be part of Dean Frenk's trip to Tanzania and Botswana and to personally observe the challenges confronting and achievements attained by HSPH projects," said Ambassador John Danilovich, a member of the group. "In Tanzania, President Kikwete's acknowledgement and appreciation of the ongoing work of HSPH and his commitment to their future efforts was particularly impressive."

The next stop was Botswana to see the work of the Botswana Harvard AIDS

Institute Partnership (BHP) in prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS. In a country that is at the heart of the epidemic, the delegation talked candidly with people living with HIV/AIDS and the doctors and researchers working to end the epidemic.

Highlights in Botswana included a visit to the village of Mochudi, where a community-wide AIDS prevention project is underway, a tour of the Botswana-Harvard HIV Reference Laboratory, and a visit to Princess Marina Hospital. The group also met with mothers involved in the *Mma Bana* Study, a clinical trial to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV, as well as couples in the Discordant

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Clockwise from top left: Prof. Wafaie Fawzi (far left) at Amtulabhai Clinic in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, with visitors Michael Walsh, Deborah Rose and Katie Vogelheim; Dean Julio Frenk at the Botswana-Harvard Partnership; Deborah Rose and Susan Plum at Mokolodi Nature Reserve, Botswana; delegation with the President of Tanzania, (front row) Dean Frenk, Irene Danilovich, President Jakaya Kikwete, John Danilovich, (back row) Tanzanian officials with HSPH faculty members Walter Willett, David Hunter and Wafaie Fawzi.

Dean's Trip

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Couples Study, in which one partner is infected with HIV and the other partner is not.

“The trip was a real life-changer for me,” said Susan Plum. “The doctors and the staff I met were so optimistic and filled with purpose, I returned to the U.S. resolved to help HSPH in any way that I am able.”

On the last evening, the group visited the Mokolodi Nature Reserve, where after a bush drive, they were treated to a *braai*, the traditional Botswana barbecue. ●



HSPH delegation, Botswana-Harvard Partnership staff, and elders of Mochudi, Botswana



In this issue...

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spotlight

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For two decades, HAI has been at the forefront of HIV/AIDS laboratory research, clinical trials, education, and leadership. HAI is dedicated to research and education to end the AIDS epidemic in Africa and developing countries.

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