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TRINIDAD & TOBAGO, WEST INDIES

CCHSRD

Caribbean Centre for Health Systems  
Research and Development

*Better Health Systems...Healthier Lives*

# CCHSRD Newsletter

“Better Health Systems...Healthier Lives”

Vol. 5 | Issue 1 | April 2023





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# About this Issue

## Contents

<b>Editorial: Conferences Promote Evidence-Informed Decision Making</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>CCHSRD Delivers at the Seventh Global Symposium on Health Systems Research (HSR2022) in Colombia</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Strengthening Evidence Informed Policymaking in Trinidad and Tobago through Intersectoral Collaboration: The Culmination of the PEERSS Project</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2022 T&amp;T National Health Research Conference: An Outstanding Exhibit of Local Research</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Call for Abstracts: 2023 National Health Research Conference – Healthcare for the Future – Emerging Threats and Sustainable Solutions</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Outstanding Researchers Awarded at T&amp;T’s National Health Research Conference</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Professor Terence Seemungal: 2022 Research for Health Lifetime Achievement Awardee</b> <i>From Trinidad &amp; Tobago to the World in Pulmonary Disease Research</i>	<b>23</b>
<b>Research Highlight: The Sex Independent Angle of Type 2 Diabetes</b>	<b>28</b>

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## Editorial

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# EDITORIAL

## Conferences Promote Evidence-Informed Decision Making

Consistent with our mandate to strengthen evidence-informed decision making, CCHSRD has been playing a leading role in the hosting of the Trinidad and Tobago Annual National Health Research Conference. We highlight this Conference in this Issue of the CCHSRD Newsletter as well as our participation in the Seventh Global Symposium on Health Systems Research (HSR2022), which was held in Bogotá, Colombia. It is also timely to share our experience at a similar Conference and information about the Network that hosted it.

Last September, a team from CCHSRD was invited to and participated in the Fifth Biennial Conference of the Africa Evidence Network, which was hosted in Pretoria, South Africa. The Conference, [EVIDENCE 2022](#), facilitated learning, sharing and collaboration among practitioners of evidence-informed decision making (EIDM) across the African continent and beyond. Its theme was *'Coming together to enhance mutual learning and innovation in EIDM'*. Participants came from all sectors including government, academia and civil society. Their common goal was a commitment to reducing poverty and inequality in Africa through EIDM. Indeed, this Conference is renowned in the international EIDM community for its contribution to the strengthening of the Evidence Ecosystem in Africa.



EVIDENCE 2022 also commemorated the tenth anniversary of the [Africa Evidence Network](#) (AEN) and highlighted its achievements. There were reflections, stories of change and innovation, exhibitions, and virtual country tours. An Awards Banquet was also hosted at which leaders in the field of EIDM were celebrated. They received Africa Evidence Leadership Awards in the categories of Evidence Producer, Evidence Mediator and Evidence User.

The AEN, which hosted the Conference, was established in 2012. It began as an informal but passionate group of African experts in the field of evidence synthesis and use. The AEN has grown significantly since then and now has over 4,000 members, a formal governance structure and is run by a full-time secretariat. Its goal is to increase the use of evidence in the decision-making process by fostering collaboration among persons engaged in EIDM, increasing their knowledge and understanding, and improving the enabling environment through advocacy.

We have a similar EIDM network in this region. I am pleased to report that CCHSRD is a member of the Latin America and the Caribbean Evidence Hub (Hub LAC). The network started as a collaboration between the Instituto Veredas (Brazil), the Universidad de Antioquia (Colombia) and the Chilean Ministry of Health in March 2022. It is growing and now has several like-minded institutions as members. Its mandate is to connect and strengthen organizations involved in the use of evidence to inform social policies through advocacy, facilitating partnerships, and sharing opportunities for capacity development and funding.



*A few attendees at the EVIDENCE 2022 Awards Banquet, including representatives from CCHSRD, Hub LAC, Knowledge to Policy Centre, and the Africa Centre for Evidence.*

One of Hub LAC's early achievements was the hosting of the first Latin American and Caribbean Meeting of Evidence for Policies, *enLACe 2022*. The aim was to strengthen the use of evidence in public policies and participants shared their EIDM experiences in the areas of health, security, social services, education, human rights, and the environment. The theme was *'Using evidence in policy development in Latin America and the Caribbean'*. CCHSRD delivered presentations on its work at the Conference, which were well received by delegates.



CCHSRD is aware that it would take time to strengthen the EIDM capacity and culture in the Caribbean. We have engaged colleagues from the AEN to share their good practices and provide guidance. In addition, through our membership in Hub LAC, we have been involved in collaborative projects that have helped us to better understand the evidence ecosystem in the Caribbean.

As was previously mentioned, this Issue of the CCHSRD Newsletter features research conferences. There are articles on the recently hosted Third Annual National Health Research Conference of Trinidad and Tobago. These include Conference highlights, the prize winners, interesting details about the research career of the 2022 Health Research Lifetime Achievement awardee, Professor Terence Seemungal, and the research study that was adjudged as the best paper at the Conference. CCHSRD's participation at the Seventh Global Symposium on Health Systems Research (HSR2022) in Colombia is also showcased as well as our hosting of the culmination event for one of our more successful projects, the IDRC-funded *'Partnership for Evidence and Equity in Responsive Social Systems (PEERSS)*.

**- Donald T. Simeon (Professor)**

*Director, Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development*

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## **CCHSRD Delivers at the Seventh Global Symposium on Health Systems Research (HSR2022) in Colombia**



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## CCHSRD Delivers at the Seventh Global Symposium on Health Systems Research (HSR2022) in Colombia

- Ms Shelly-Ann Hunte  
Research Fellow, CCHSRD

CCHSRD was well represented and delivered presentations at the [7th Global Symposium on Health Systems Research \(HSR2022\)](#), which was held in Bogotá, Colombia in November 2022. The theme of the Symposium was **'Health Systems Performance in the Political Agenda: Sharing lessons for current and future global challenges'**.

One of the CCHSRD presentations was at the satellite session titled **'Promoting Intersectoral Collaboration through Knowledge Translation: Lessons from the Partnership for Evidence and Equity in Responsive Social Systems (PEERSS)'**. Ms Shelly-Ann Hunte, Research Fellow, CCHSRD joined representatives from other PEERSS partner countries as they shared their experiences, achievements and lessons learned from the project. CCHSRD was one of 13 partners located in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, and the Middle East. Ms Hunte highlighted how the findings from a Needs Assessment Exercise guided the development of CCHSRD's programme of work.



Top Right: Ms Shelly-Ann Hunte delivering a presentation during a session of HSR2022.

# CCHSRD Delivers at the Seventh Global Symposium on Health Systems Research

This included building capacity in evidence-informed policymaking through the hosting of training workshops and coaching sessions over several months. This led to the co-production of knowledge translation products in collaboration with four social sector Ministries (Planning and Development; Labour; Sport and Community Development; and Social Development and Family Services). In the panel discussion that followed the presentations, CCHSRD was among the five partners who fielded questions from the audience and engaged in discourse about evidence informed decision-making.

Professor Donald Simeon, Director, CCHSRD, was a member of the Latin America and Caribbean Regional Advisory Group for HSR 2022. He also attended the Symposium and presented the findings from an analysis of the experience of five (5) Latin American and Caribbean countries regarding the use of collaborative strategies in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The countries included Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico and Trinidad and Tobago. For each country, after presenting health systems context, the key stakeholders involved in the COVID-19 response were identified and the presence, nature and dynamics of collaborative strategies determined.

This presentation was delivered during a satellite session titled *‘Overview of health systems and policy in the Region of the Americas: Evidence from the literature and reflections from the HSG pre-conferences’*. This session was co-hosted by the Pan American Health Organization and Health Systems Global. The primary objective was to showcase research related to HSG 2022 theme and sub-themes emanating from the regional pre-conferences that were held in Latin American and the Caribbean. The Caribbean pre-conference had been hosted by CCHSRD in January 2022.



*Prof Donald Simeon during his presentation at a session of HSR2022.*



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## **Strengthening Evidence Informed Policymaking in Trinidad and Tobago through Intersectoral Collaboration: The Culmination of the PEERSS Project**





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# Strengthening Evidence Informed Policymaking in Trinidad and Tobago through Intersectoral Collaboration

## The Culmination of the PEERSS Project

- Ms Jaclyn Holdsworth

*Intern, Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Programme, McMaster University*

CCHSRD recently hosted a culmination event to celebrate achievements in strengthening the capacity to support the development of evidence-informed and equity-based social policies in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T).

As a part of the international, 13-country [Partnership for Evidence and Equity in Responsive Social Systems \(PEERSS\)](#) project, the CCHSRD conducted Evidence Informed Policymaking (EIP) training and coaching for four social sector Ministries in T&T. The goal was to strengthen the respective Ministries' capacities to utilise evidence in decision-making as well as to incorporate the views of stakeholders in the process. The project's goal was consistent with T&T's National Development Strategy's call for "evidenced-based decision-making" to reduce government inefficiencies and wastage, and to reduce costly ad-hoc and reactionary policies.



*Officials from The University of the West Indies and Social Sector Ministries were in attendance to celebrate the success of the PEERSS Project in T&T.*

# The Culmination of the PEERSS Project

The four participating Ministries utilised their newly acquired skills to co-produce Knowledge Translation (KT) products in collaboration with CCHSRD. Each Ministry's KT product synthesised local, contextualised evidence as well as international evidence to address a pressing issue in T&T that required policy action:

- Ministry of Labour (MoL): *“Key Strategies to Remedy the Skills Gaps and Unfilled Demand for Labour in the Civil Service of Trinidad and Tobago”*
- Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS): *“Key Strategies/ Interventions to Address the “Dependency Syndrome” on the State’s Social Welfare System in Trinidad and Tobago”*
- Ministry of Planning and Development (MoPD): *“Key Strategies/ Interventions to Address Underperformance of Males in the Education System in Trinidad and Tobago”*
- Ministry of Sport and Community Development (MSCD): *“Facilitating Sustainable Communities in Trinidad and Tobago with an Emphasis on Community Based Participatory Approaches”* (in progress).

At the culmination event, each of the four participating Ministries shared highlights from their KT products as well as their experiences with the training and coaching programme. All coachees demonstrated new aptitudes that they were applying in their respective Ministries.

*“With the rigor involved in this process [conduct and use of systematic reviews], its use will improve the content and quality of our research. It will also ensure that our research is applicable, and reduce biases and errors in policy formulation.”* – Ms Andreah Baksh, MoPD

*“[The CCHSRD’s] conduct demonstrated to us not only how to use the information, but also how to be coaches ourselves because the goal of this initiative was for us to get the knowledge as well as to share the knowledge.”* – Mr Fidel Sanatan, MSCD



(L-R): Ms Jasmine Pascall, Deputy Permanent Secretary, MSDFS; Ms Kevar Cummings-Williams, Deputy Permanent Secretary, MoL; Ms Beverly Reid-Samuel, Deputy Permanent Secretary, MSCD; Dr Stewart Smith, Senior Health Systems Advisor, MoH; Professor Indar Ramnarine, Deputy Principal, The UWI; Professor Donald Simeon, Director, CCHSRD; and Ms Natalie Willis, Permanent Secretary, MoL on stage at the culmination event.

# The Culmination of the PEERSS Project



Above (L-R): Coachees from the Ministry of Labour with Ms Natalie Willis, Permanent Secretary (center) and Ms Kevar Cummings-Williams, Deputy Permanent Secretary (second from right); and Coachees from the Ministry of Planning and Development with Ms Debra Dipchandsingh, Acting Director, Socio Economic Policy Unit (second from left)

Below (L-R): Coachees from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services; and Coachees from the Ministry of Sport and Community Development with Ms Beverly Reid-Samuel, Deputy Permanent Secretary (fourth from right)



*“I also wish to highlight my view on the importance of a continued relationship between our Ministry and the CCHSRD, in order to increase the number of professionals trained in the social sector. This would provide an opportunity to reap the collective dividend of enhanced abilities in Evidence Informed Policymaking, for more meaningful national service delivery.”*

– Ms Joanna Joseph, MSCD

The event was attended by several Permanent Secretaries and Deputy Permanent Secretaries as well as the Deputy Principal and the Dean of the Faculty of Medical Sciences, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. There was also an awards ceremony at which the top performers of the programme were celebrated.

CCHSRD intends to continue collaborating with these social sector Ministries. The goal is for the learnings from this project to be sustainable and transferable through continued engagement and re-training, and the sharing of successful EIP practices across the health and social sectors.



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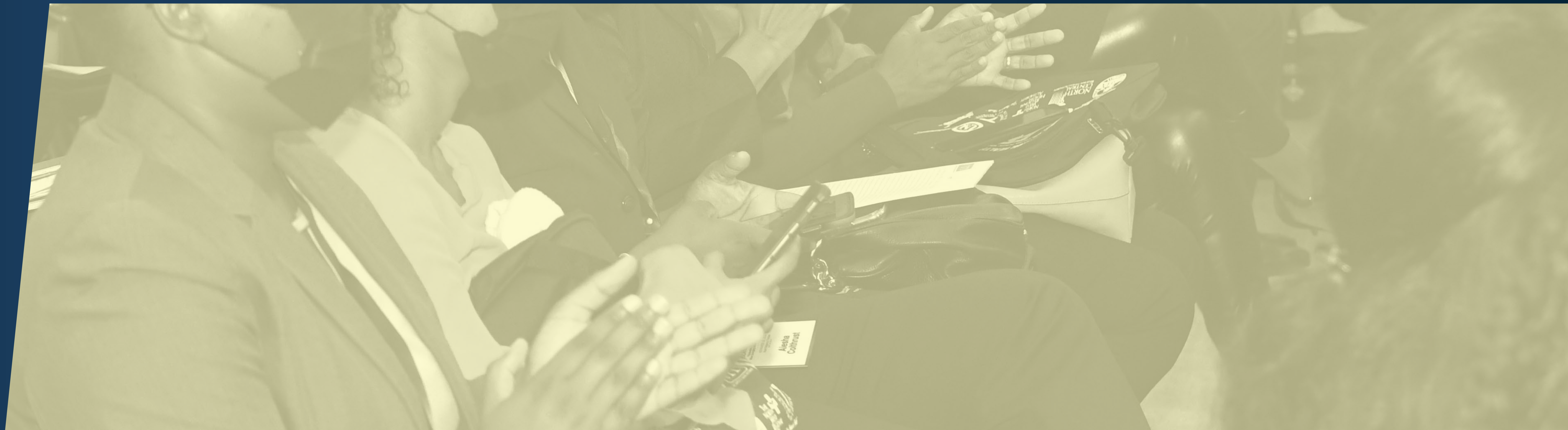
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## **2022 T&T National Health Research Conference: An Outstanding Exhibit of Local Research**



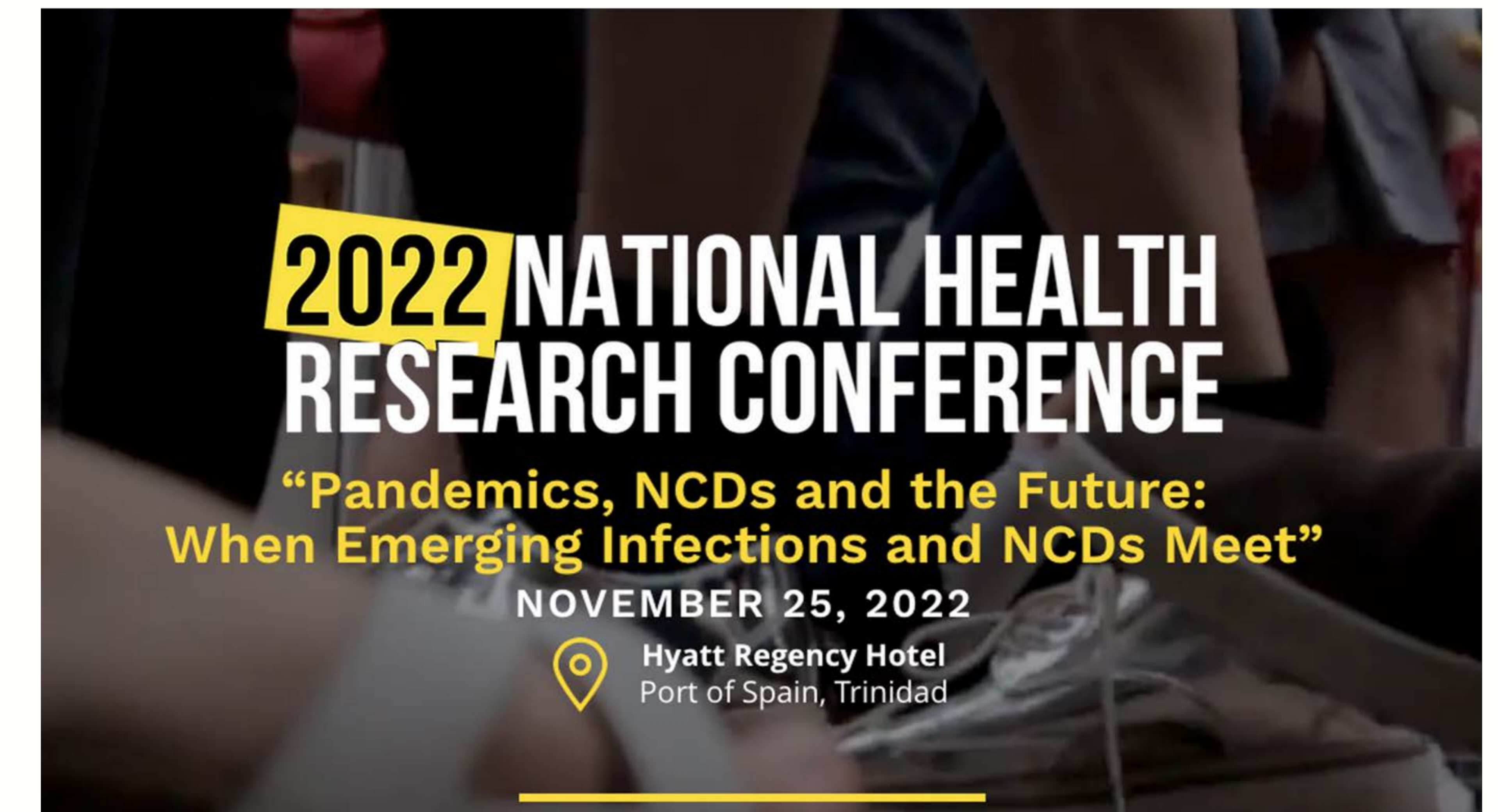
# 2022 T&T National Health Research Conference

## An Outstanding Exhibit of Local Research

- Ms Alissa Moore  
*Research Assistant, CCHSRD*

After the first two years in the virtual landscape, the Third Annual National Health Research Conference (NHRC) of Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) was hosted face-to-face on November 25, 2022 at the Hyatt Regency, Port of Spain. The theme was “Pandemics, NCDs and the Future: When Infections and NCDs Meet” and the Conference provided a platform for a showcase of indigenous health research findings that could inform the development of policies, guide programming and clinical practice towards the strengthening of the country’s health system.

The successful hosting of the 2022 NHRC was a sterling example of what can be achieved through strong partnerships. The collaborating institutions must be commended for their continued commitment. They included the Ministry of Health; Tobago House of Assembly; The University of the West Indies; University of Trinidad and Tobago; University of the Southern Caribbean; and the Regional Health Authorities.



The NHRC Inter-Institution Planning Committee was chaired by Professor Donald Simeon, Director, CCHSRD, and comprised representatives from the partnering institutions. Its Scientific Review sub-committee deliberated and selected over 70 research papers for oral or poster presentation, covering a wide range of topics including Infectious Diseases, Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases, Clinical/Laboratory Studies and Mental Health and Family Planning. The abstracts of the Conference presentations were published in a Supplement of the Caribbean Medical Journal (CMJ).

# An Outstanding Exhibit of Local Research

The interactive [NHRC website](#) provided registrants with electronic access to the Conference Programme, the CMJ Supplement, e-posters and pre-recorded video presentations of posters. It also included the profiles of all the delegates, facilities for one-on-one chat, voting polls, and a live community forum. These features encouraged interaction, networking and discussion before, during and after the Conference.

Conference satellite events included an online **Training Workshop** and a **Health Fair**. The Workshop, which was held on November 24 was titled “Conducting Research During a Pandemic: Online Platforms and Ethical Issues”. It was timely as these were challenges that researchers had to address. The Health Fair was hosted by the North West Regional Health Authority and provided conference delegates with free health screenings.

The **Opening Ceremony** featured remarks by senior officials from the partner institutions as well as a captivating feature lecture by Professor Jonathan Patz (John P. Holton Chair of Health and the Environment, University of Wisconsin-Madison) on “The Climate Crisis: Implications for both Infectious and Non-Communicable Diseases”. The Honourable Minister of Health of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr Terrence Deyalsingh, also delivered an engaging address.

The 2022 NHRC comprised **Four Sessions** of oral presentations. Additionally, over 50 digital poster presentations were displayed on large screens during scheduled breaks. This was the first use of digital poster screens at a large research conference in T&T and they were well received by delegates and facilitated greater engagement and interaction.



(Above) L-R: Opening Ceremony Officials share a light moment during the Conference; the The Honourable Terrence Deyalsingh, Minister of Health, Trinidad and Tobago during his address; and International Guest Speaker, Professor Jonathan Patz, who presented virtually from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

(Below) A snapshot of Conference attendees; and a presenter using one of the digital poster presentation displays.



# An Outstanding Exhibit of Local Research

The Conference culminated with an **Awards and Closing Ceremony** when the top presenters received their prizes and Professor Terence Seemungal was honoured as the 2022 Research for Health Lifetime Achievement Awardee.

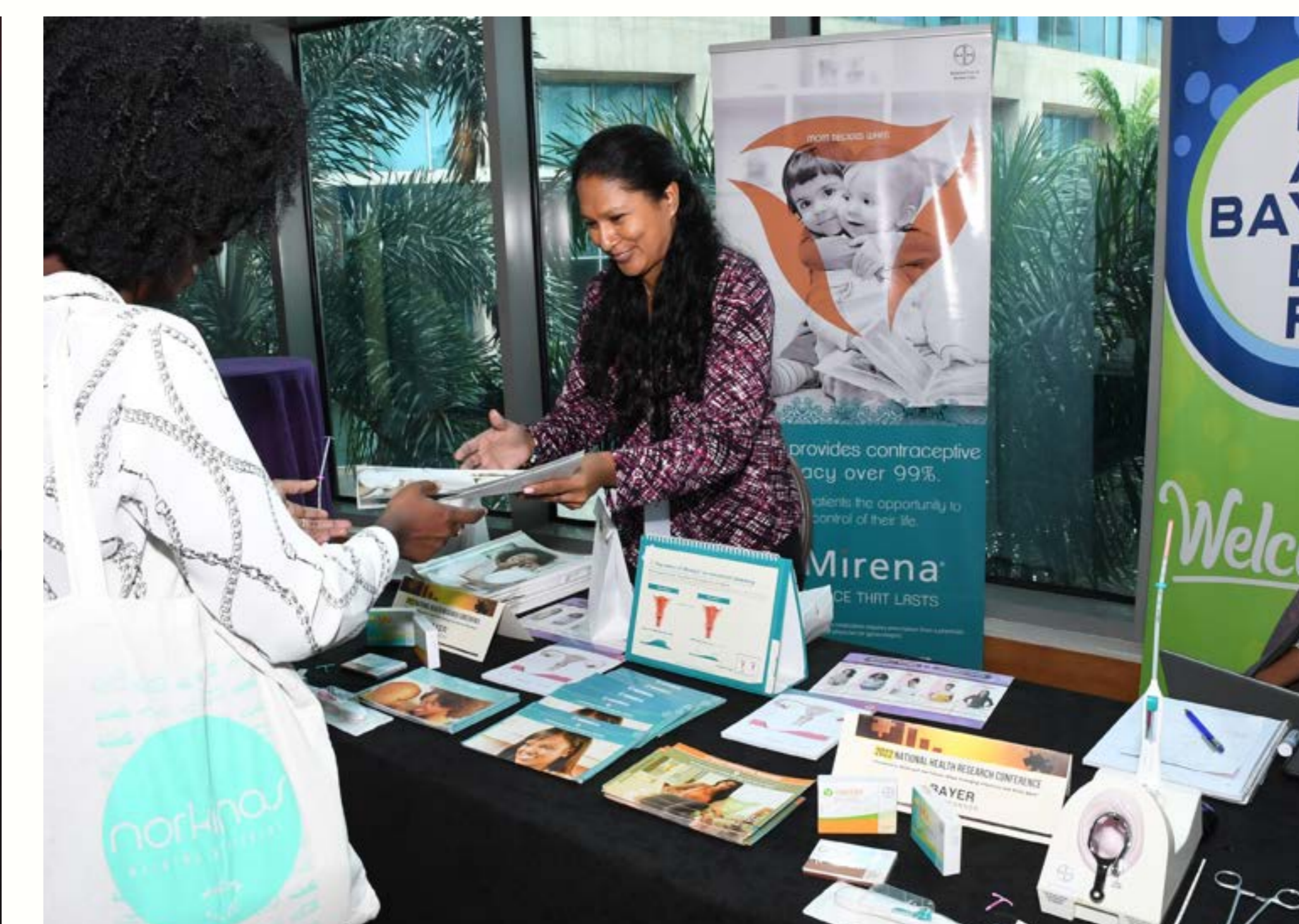
The Planning Committee acknowledged the critical contributions of its sponsors: Ministry of Health / TT Moves, EBSCO Host, Western Scientific, Condell Consulting, Roche, Guardian Life, Smith Robertson, and V&S Pharmaceuticals.

The 2023 NHRC will be held on November 17, and we look forward to another exceptional display of local research, under the theme, **“Healthcare for the Future: Emerging Threats and Sustainable Solutions”**.



(Above) Benedita Menezes (EBSCO Information Services) delivering her presentation on “How can EBSCO’s Clinical Decisions Tools Support Education and Research Activities?”; and Dr Roma Bridgelal-Nagassar (Ministry of Health/TT Moves) informing delegates about the “Diabetes in Pregnancy National Screening and Management Programme”.

(Below) Left: Professor Terence Seemungal receiving his award from Professor Chidum Ezenwaka (The UWI); Middle: Attendees had the opportunity to visit the booths of Conference sponsors; and Right: Attendees were all smiles as they received materials and giveaways from sponsors.





# An Outstanding Exhibit of Local Research



*[Click here to view more highlights and photos from the 2022 Conference!](#)*



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# Submit Your Research!



## CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

**2023**  
**NHRC**

# NATIONAL HEALTH RESEARCH CONFERENCE

**NOVEMBER 17, 2023**

**Healthcare for the Future:  
Emerging Threats and Sustainable Solutions**

**Submit Your Abstract!**

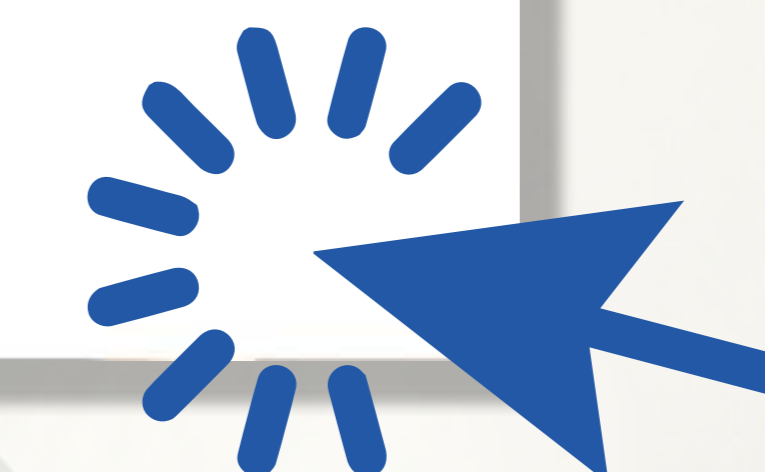
View Submission Guidelines at  
[www.healthresearchconferencett.com/call](http://www.healthresearchconferencett.com/call)

**DEADLINE: JUNE 30, 2023**

The Ministry of Health; Tobago House of Assembly; Faculty of Medical Sciences & Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development, The University of the West Indies; The University of Trinidad and Tobago; The University of the Southern Caribbean; and the Regional Health Authorities, are collaborating to host the country's Fourth Annual National Health Research Conference on **November 17, 2023**.

The Theme for the 2023 Conference is **"Healthcare for the Future: Emerging Threats and Sustainable Solutions"**.

Quality Abstracts in ALL HEALTH AREAS can be submitted (e.g. Public Health, Environmental Health, Biomedical Research, Communicable and Non-Communicable Diseases, Nutrition, Health Economics, Social and Behavioural Health Sciences, etc.).



**CLICK HERE**

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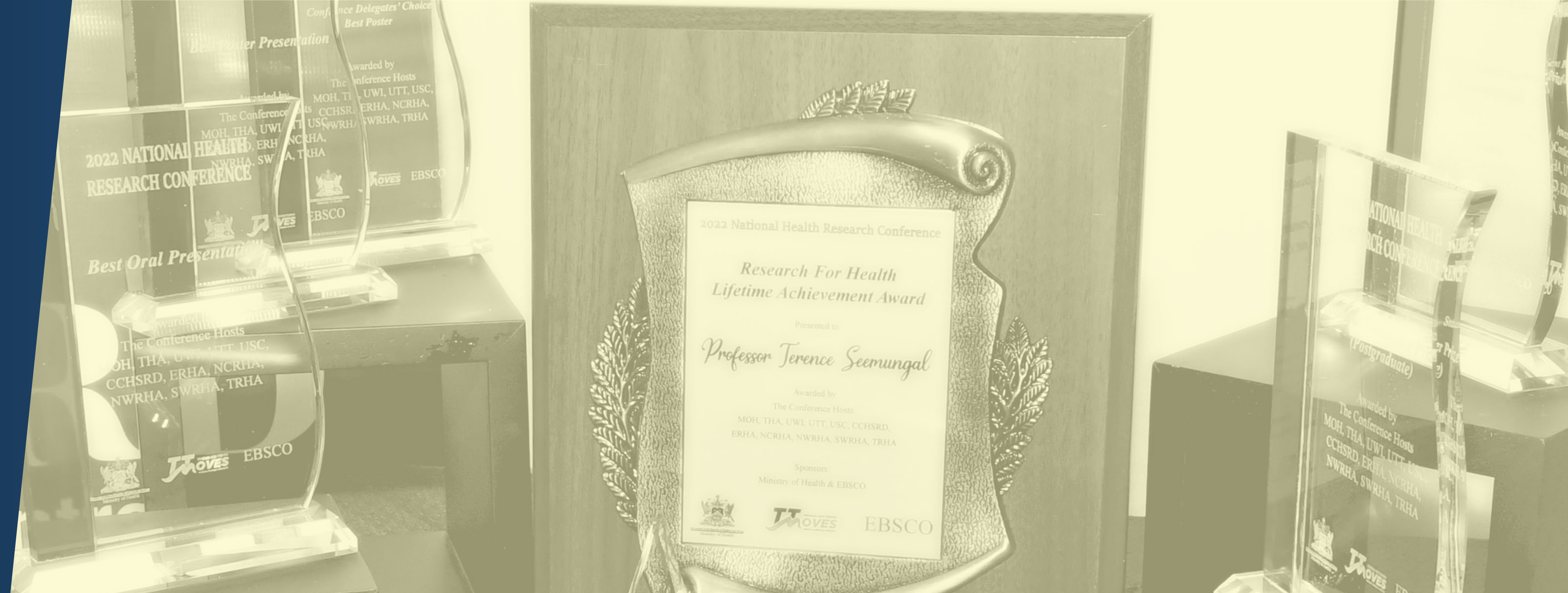
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# Outstanding Researchers Awarded at T&T's National Health Research Conference





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## Outstanding Researchers Awarded at T&T's National Health Research Conference

- Ms Kershelle Barker  
*Junior Fellow, Evidence Synthesis, CCHSRD*

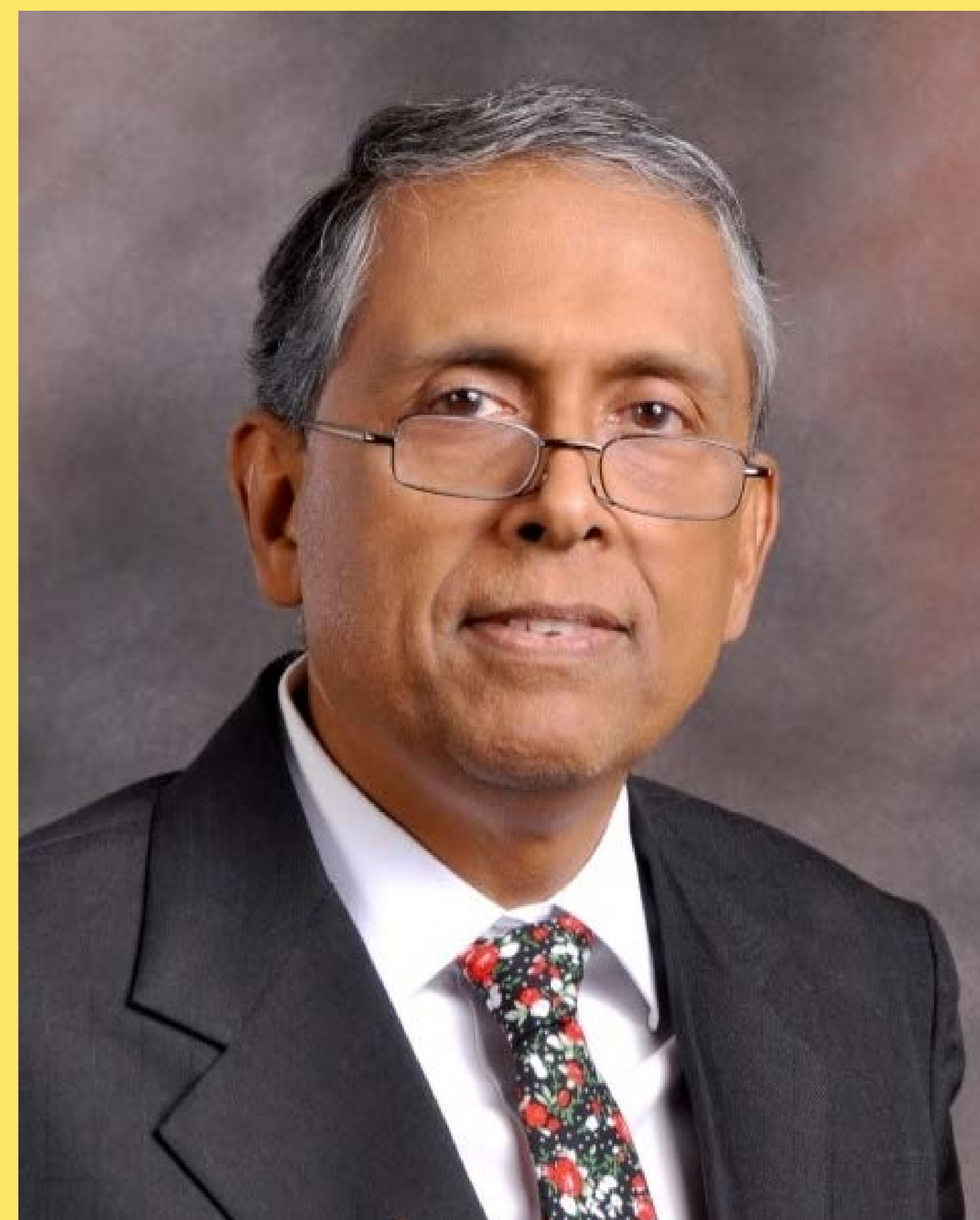
The 2022 Trinidad and Tobago National Health Research Conference featured 71 oral and poster presentations of quality research on infectious and non-communicable diseases, clinical studies and more. At the Awards Ceremony, Professor Terence Seemungal was honoured with the Research for Health Lifetime Achievement Award. In addition, the top conference presentations in different categories were rewarded.



# Outstanding Researchers Awarded at T&T's National Health Research Conference

A panel of judges scored each research paper. Criteria included methodology, results, significance of the findings, presentation, inter alia

*...and the winners were:*



## **Prof Terence Seemungal Lifetime Achievement Award**

*2022 National Health Research Conference*

Read about Prof Seemungal's  
Life in Reseach on [Pages 23-27](#).



## **Early Career Researcher Prize & Best Oral Presentation Dr Gavaskar Ramnanansingh**

**The Sex Independent Angle of Type 2 Diabetes**  
*Gavaskar Ramnanansingh, Shivananda Nayak*

In this innovative study, the researchers tested a novel sex-independent anthropometric index – termed Angle Index, which characterized central obesity geometrically. The Angle Index was found to be superior to other anthropometric metrics such as waist circumference and conicity index in discriminating between patients with and without Type 2 diabetes.

*Read more about Dr Ramnanansingh's study on [Pages 28-30](#).*



## **Undergraduate Student Researcher Prize**

**The Effectiveness of Telemedicine on the Management of Chronic Diseases (Diabetes, Hypertension and Coronary Heart Disease) at the Eastern Regional Health Authority during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

*Jessie Gopaulsingh, Zada Gopee, Roneice Gould, Anique Gray, Kishan Harripersad, Rachael Harripersad, Nalini Heeralal, Raveed Khan*

This study compared the use of telemedicine with face-to-face visits in the management of chronic diseases at primary care facilities. Results indicated that the standard of care was preserved with the use of telemedicine, and there were no differences in patients' blood pressure and blood glucose control.

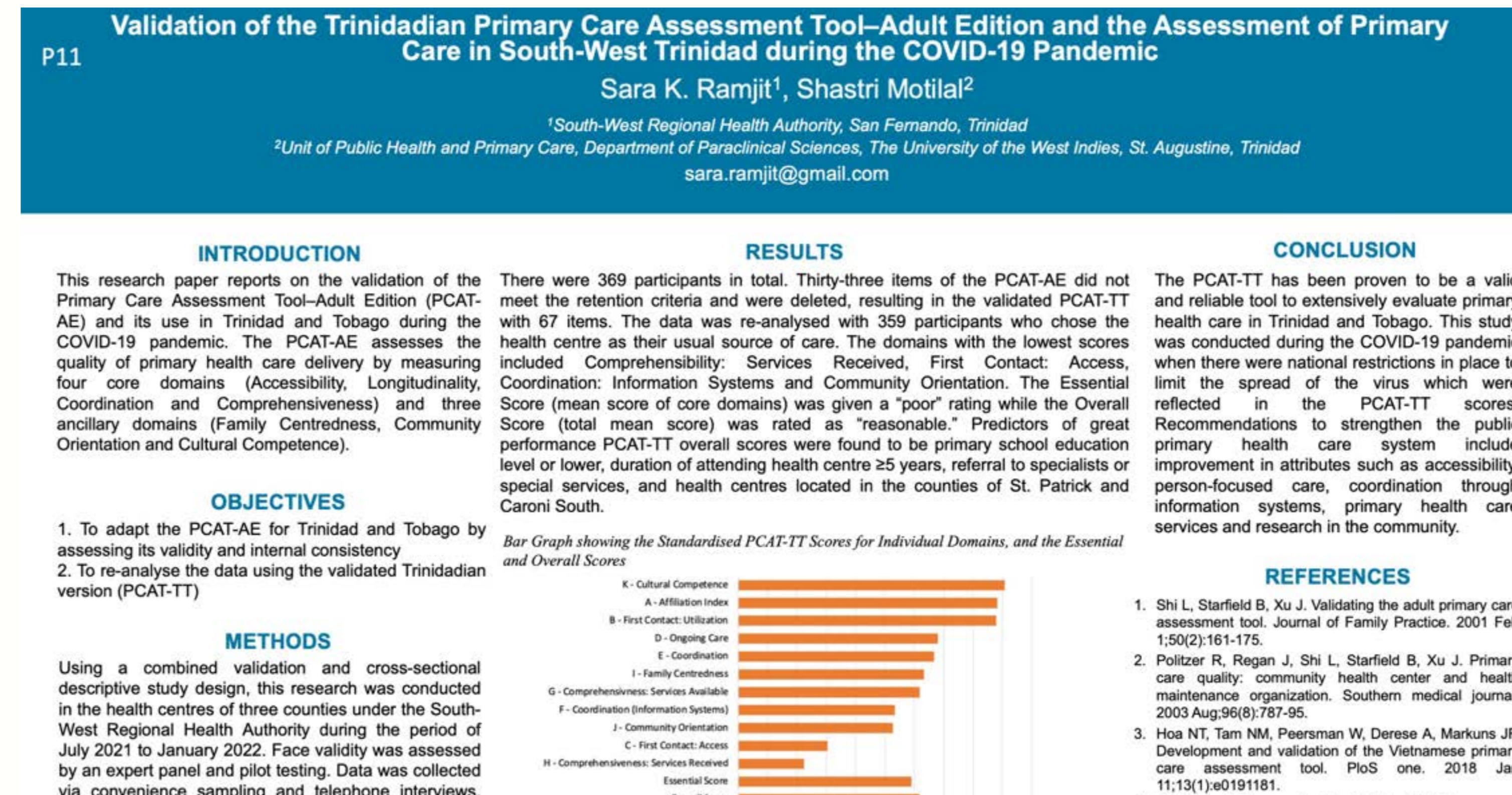
# Outstanding Researchers Awarded at T&T's National Health Research Conference



**Postgraduate Student Researcher Prize  
Dr Shane Charles**

## Timing of Surgery following SARS-CoV-2 Infection: An International Prospective Cohort Study

This study found that mortality was higher among patients who had surgery within 6 weeks of a SARS-CoV-2 diagnosis compared with those who were diagnosed earlier. Among patients diagnosed at least 7 weeks before surgery, mortality was higher in those with ongoing COVID-19 symptoms compared with recovered or asymptomatic patients. These findings suggested that surgery should be delayed for at least 7 weeks following SARS-CoV-2 infection.



**Best Poster Presentation  
Sara K. Ramjit**

## Validation of the Trinidadian Primary Care Assessment Tool – Adult Edition (PCAT-AE) and the Assessment of Primary Care in South-West Trinidad During the COVID-19 Pandemic

*Sara K. Ramjit, Shastri Motilal*

The study reviewed the PCAT-AE, an instrument to measure the quality of services provided in primary care settings, for use in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T). After removing items that were deemed to be inappropriate for the local settings, the customised tool (PCAT-TT) was determined to be valid. When used, the researchers identified the need for improvements in attributes such as accessibility and patient-focused care.



**Conference Delegates' Choice\* -  
Best Poster**

## The Prevalence of Violence against Healthcare Workers in the Public Sector – A Trinbagonian Survey

*Darren Dookeeram, Hariharan Seetharam, Kanisha Caton, Sade Stoute, Lake Taylor, Cassy Thomas, Kirtesha Thomas, Cherelle Thompson, Takiyah Toppin, Jakeilia Trim*

The researchers found that 45.2% of healthcare workers (HCWs) in T&T's public sector had experienced and 75.8% had witnessed violence against HCWs. The most common type of violence was verbal abuse, mainly perpetrated by patients and their relatives. Associated factors included doubts of physicians' altruism and competence, poor infrastructure/ management, and dissatisfaction with care.

\*For this prize, Conference attendees were asked to select which they thought was the best poster.



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2022 National Health Research  
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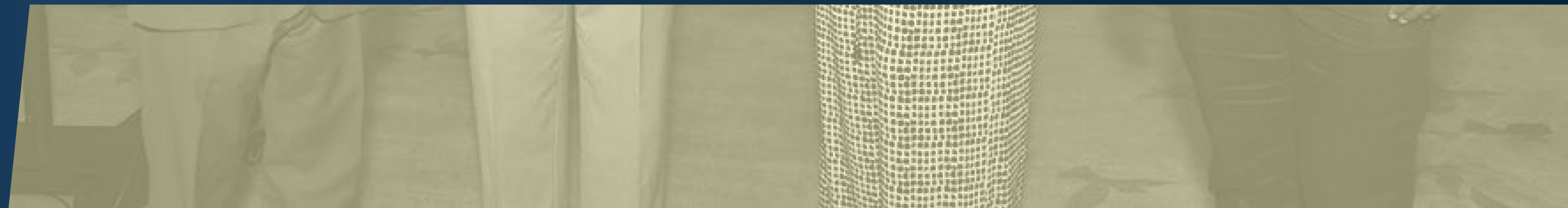
Outstanding Researchers  
Awarded at T&T's NHRC

**Professor Terence Seemungal:  
From T&T to the World in  
Pulmonary Disease Research**

Research Highlight: The Sex  
Independent Angle of Type 2  
Diabetes



## **Professor Terence Seemungal: 2022 Research for Health Lifetime Achievement Awardee**



# Professor Terence Seemungal

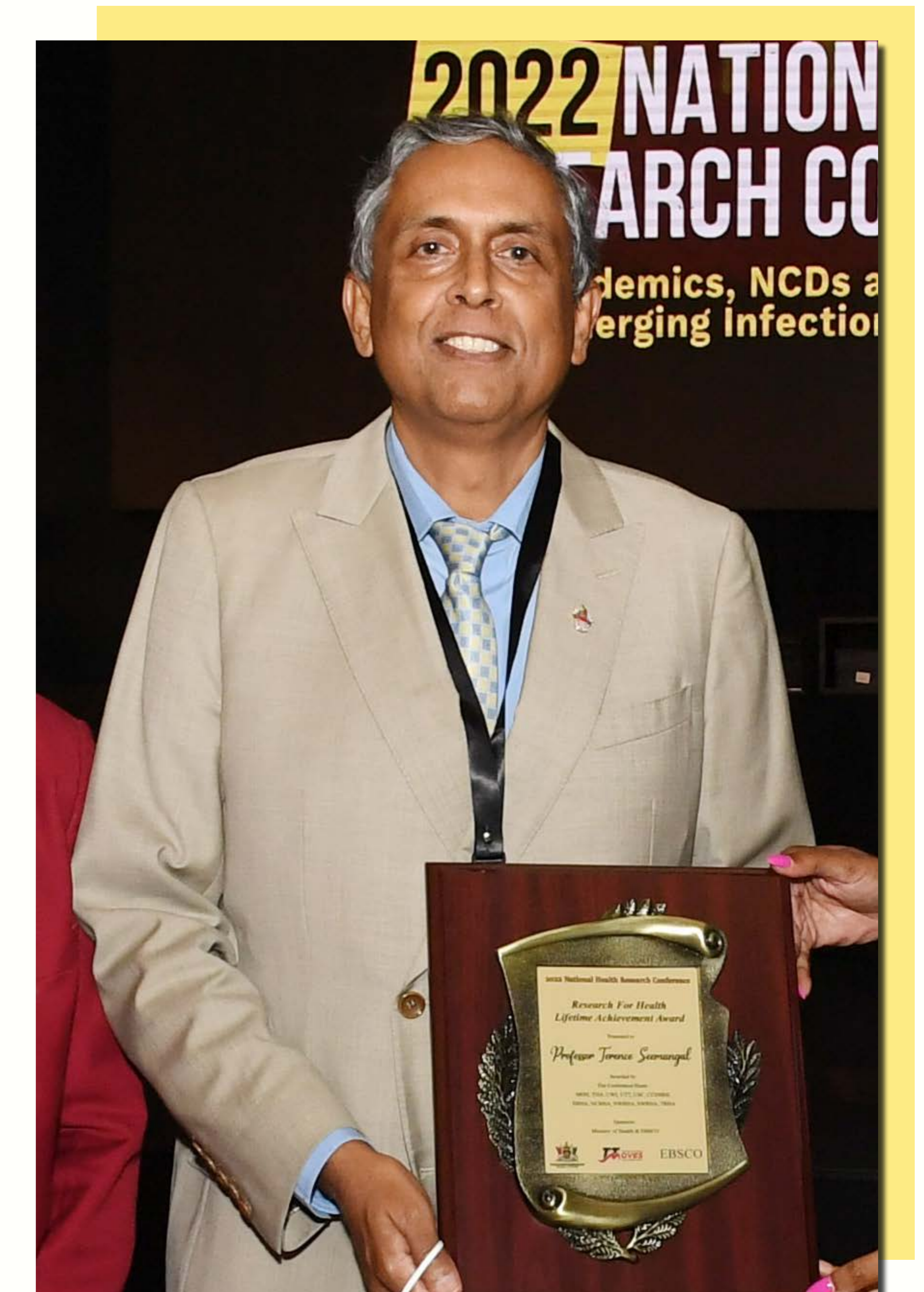
## 2022 Research for Health Lifetime Achievement Awardee

### From Trinidad & Tobago to the World in Pulmonary Disease Research

- *Ms Kershelle Barker*  
Junior Fellow, Evidence Synthesis, CCHSRD

A specialist in internal medicine and diseases of the lungs, Professor Terence Seemungal has made invaluable contributions to his field. His journey in research, however, was anything but linear. In his feature presentation at the 2022 T&T National Health Research Conference, Professor Seemungal shared his research motivations and a summary of his work over the past three decades.

Unlike many scientists who would say that it was a lifelong dream, Professor Seemungal indicated that he did not always want to be a researcher. He added that before his MBBS (Hons) degree, he had completed an MSc. in Mathematics at The University of the West Indies (The UWI), St. Augustine. This was significant as he noted that the basic principles acquired in his study of Mathematics helped throughout his career.





# From Trinidad & Tobago to the World in Pulmonary Disease Research

When he started his journey in medicine, he then knew that he wanted to conduct medical research. His ultimate goal was to eliminate one disease – sarcoidosis<sup>1</sup>. In his own words, he “failed in [his] goal of eliminating one disease”; however, this “failure” was overshadowed by an immensely successful research career. While a Ph.D. student at the University of London, Seemungal sought a research post and secured one at the London Chest Hospital. There was no available project on sarcoidosis, but there was one on chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) – to study the viral causes of exacerbations. Little did he know that COPD would become the focus of his research life.

He began his first study in 1995, sampling COPD patients for respiratory viral infections. What was supposed to be a two-year project – one year collecting samples and one year of analysis – was inadvertently extended, due to the “very hot summer” of 1996. The refrigerator that housed all of the samples broke down, and Seemungal had to spend another year collecting new samples, or his Ph.D. would have been in jeopardy.

By the end of the second year, Seemungal received an award from the British Lung Foundation, and in December 1996, he successfully presented his first paper to experts in respiratory medicine at the British Thoracic Society.

<sup>1</sup> Sarcoidosis is “an inflammatory disease in which the immune system overreacts, causing clusters of inflamed tissue called “granulomas” to form in different organs of the body” – American Lung Association

“*Nobody knows your research like you... if you work at it yourself. You must enter the data, you must analyse the data, and test your hypothesis.*”

In 1998, he published [one of his most highly cited papers](#), in which he found that COPD patients who had three or more exacerbations in a year had a worse quality of life. This “turned out to be one of the most important discoveries for COPD in years” and is a critical input in the current Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD) guidelines.

Seemungal went on to make another important discovery while in clinical training, somewhat by chance as the study was not designed as such. He discovered an anomaly – rhinoviruses were prevalent during exacerbations in COPD patients, but the presence of respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) appeared to conceal the effects of rhinoviruses on patients’ lung function. He realised that patients who had RSV, whether at exacerbation or at baseline, had more inflammatory markers in their blood, and hypothesised that these patients had chronic RSV infections. This was subsequently confirmed.

After completing specialist training in internal and respiratory medicine in London, Seemungal returned to Trinidad and Tobago. Eager to continue studying COPD, he was met with some scepticism from a senior researcher who insisted there was “no such thing as COPD in Trinidad”. Seemungal knew, however, that this was not the case, based on his experience as a House Officer at the Caura Hospital before he had left T&T for London. The difficulty was that they did not have the equipment to measure and confirm it.

# From Trinidad & Tobago to the World in Pulmonary Disease Research

Along with a group of student researchers, he designed a study and collected lung function data from patients at hospitals. The study was conducted in 2005, and [the paper was published](#) in the West Indian Medical Journal (WIMJ). They found that approximately 20% of patients admitted to adult medical wards in a general hospital in Trinidad and Tobago had COPD. Additionally, patients with a lower forced expiratory volume (FEV1)<sup>2</sup> were more likely to be admitted for cardiovascular disease (CVD). He later found that lower FEV1 also predicted length of stay in hospital. A similar study was conducted at the community level, and findings revealed there was approximately 20% prevalence of COPD in chronic disease clinics in T&T. The relationship between COPD and CVD was further explored, looking at homocysteine as a marker of CVD.

Other notable career milestones included:

- In 2012, Seemungal was elected the first President of the Thoracic Society of Trinidad and Tobago, and continued research into COPD and other chronic lung diseases.
- Three years later, Professor Seemungal was appointed Dean of the Faculty of Medical Sciences (FMS), The UWI.
- In 2017, he led a team that completed the first [National Study of Chronic Lung Disease](#), in which they discovered that approximately 9.5% of the T&T population aged 40 years and over had COPD.
- In 2018, he guided the establishment of the Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development at The UWI.



*Professor Seemungal delivering his Professorial Inaugural Lecture at The UWI St. Augustine, 2011*

The Rise of Non-Communicable Diseases – certainly not a breath of fresh air!

Terence Seemungal  
Professor of Medicine

Over the years, Professor Seemungal acquired and utilised many research techniques, and was pulled in different directions. He worked with other researchers as well as students on research topics in neurology, transplants, cardiology, and even sudden deaths. He has contributed significantly to the body of knowledge on lung diseases; and is a highly cited researcher (over 18,000 citations and an H-index of 32), with a remarkable body of high-quality, original and relevant research. Professor Seemungal has received several awards and honours over the years, including being ranked among the top 10 authors of the [world's 100 most influential papers on COPD](#) (2015); and among the [top 2% of most impactful scientists in his field globally](#) (2022).

Professor Terence Seemungal

# From Trinidad & Tobago to the World in Pulmonary Disease Research



As he neared the end of his presentation at the 2022 Trinidad and Tobago National Health Research Conference on his “Life in Medical Research”, Professor Seemungal thanked his supervisors, colleagues and friends, and students whom he had been fortunate to work with throughout the years. He specially thanked his wife who has “put up with [his] obsession in research from Ph.D. to now”, highlighting the countless late hours he spent analysing data.

Professor Seemungal indicated that he still collaborated with committed researchers, and noted that it has been a “great joy” to do what he has done. As he so aptly closed...

*“The work continues...”*

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*At the 2022 T&T National Health Research Conference, Prof Seemungal was honoured with the Research for Health Lifetime Achievement Award, joining the previous awardees: Professor David Picou (awarded in 2020) and Professor Vijay Naraynsingh (2021).*

*Professor Seemungal kept Conference attendees captivated by his feature speech at the 2022 NHRC.*



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**Research Highlight: The Sex  
Independent Angle of Type 2  
Diabetes**



# Research Highlight: The Sex Independent Angle of Type 2 Diabetes

# Research Highlight

## The Sex Independent Angle of Type 2 Diabetes

- *Dr Gavaskar Ramnanansingh*

*Trinidad & Tobago Phlebotomy Services*

*(Winner of the Early Career Research Prize and Best Oral Presentation Prize at the 2022 T&T National Health Research Conference)*



When Arnold Schwarzenegger and Ronnie Coleman, both bodybuilders, won their “Mr. Olympia” titles, based on their body mass index (BMI), they would be classified as obese (as their BMIs were over 30 kgm<sup>-2</sup>). However, the images of these men at that time were far from obese; with 0.5% body fat. Comparing them with someone with a much higher body fat percentage but the same BMI; it is easy to see the difference between an obese person and someone with a high muscle mass. The BMI scale in this instance would be inaccurate and your eyes would give you a better indicator as to who is obese. Is there a way we can better quantify central obesity along similar lines?

I successfully published an [article in the BMJ Open](#) in which central obesity was geometrically characterized using a metric called “Angle Index” (AI) in an attempt to better quantify obesity, as one would see it.

AI can be defined by the following equation with units in radians.

$$AI = \pi + \tan^{-1} \left[ \frac{W_U C - HC}{2(d_{UH})} \right] - \tan^{-1} \left[ \frac{W_M C - W_U C}{2(d_{MU})} \right]$$

Where  $W_U C$  = umbilical waist circumference;

$W_M C$  = minimal waist circumference;

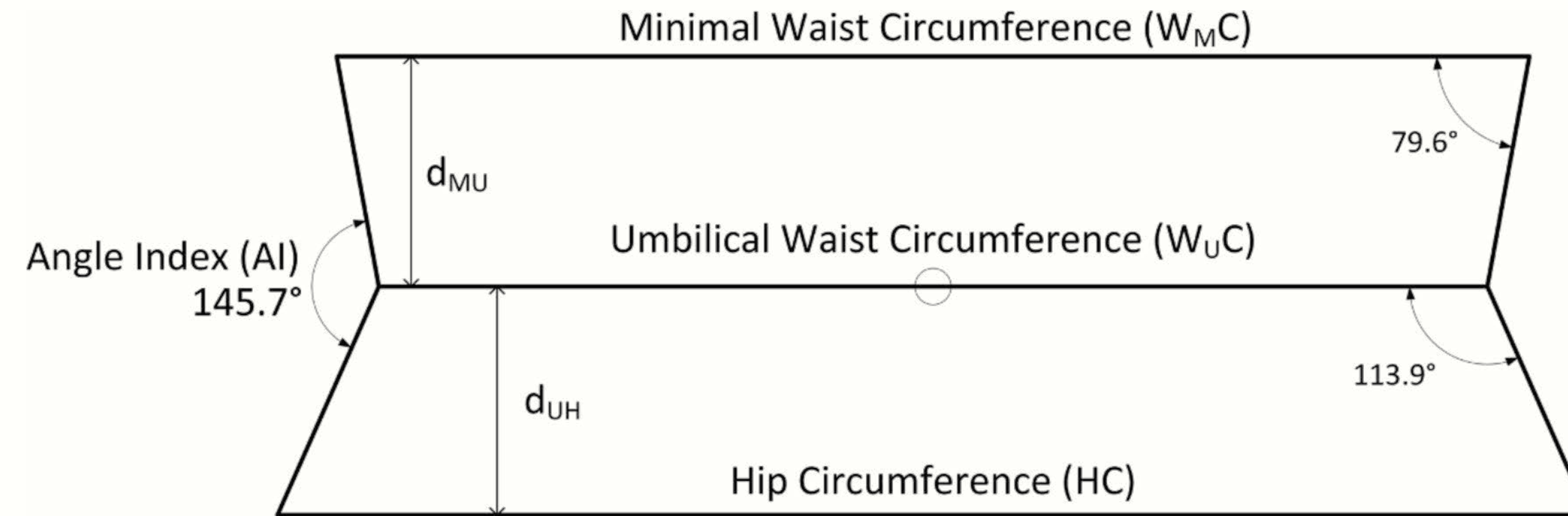
HC = hip circumference;

$d_{UH}$  = the perpendicular distance from the traverse section of the umbilical waist region to the traverse section of the hip region;

$d_{MU}$  = perpendicular distance from the traverse section of the minimal waist region to the traverse section of the umbilical waist region.

Both  $d_{UH}$  and  $d_{MU}$  were arbitrarily assigned a value of 20 cm.

# The Sex Independent Angle of Type 2 Diabetes



My aim was to see whether Angle Index could be a discriminator for patients with Type 2 diabetes. The paper demonstrated it was and surprisingly, the angle was independent of sex. This meant that we could use one cut off value for both males and females. Patients with Type 2 diabetes, whether male or female, were four more times likely to have an Angle Index of  $184^\circ$  and above than patients without diabetes.

The implication of these findings is that in addition to measuring patients' weights, heights and waist circumference, we may also need to obtain measurements of hip size and waist sizes to better characterise central obesity and predict non-communicable diseases such as Type 2 diabetes.



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# CCHSRD Newsletter

“Better Health Systems...Healthier Lives”

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