CCHSRD Newsletter
“Better Health Systems...Healthier Lives”
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Editorial

The Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development Newsletter is a primary platform for the CCHSRD to connect and communicate with our stakeholders. On a quarterly basis, we will share articles related to health research, focusing on relevant and timely Health Policy and Systems Research evidence as well as training and funding opportunities. Research initiatives embarked upon by the Faculty of Medical Sciences (FMS) and the CCHSRD will also be highlighted.

This issue features some of the research and training activities hosted by the FMS so far in 2019. Notably, the FMS held its Annual Research Day, which was over-subscribed and showcased research findings of national and international significance. It was therefore not surprising that the Research Day received excellent coverage by a number of media houses. We also introduce one of the Centre’s projects, which focuses on sustainable institutional capacity building for evidence-informed decision-making. In this issue, the One Health Project is also highlighted as an embodiment of policy in action and regional collaboration.

Thanks to the Centre for Medical Sciences Education, FMS, especially Mr. Michael Khan and Mr. Neil Joseph for their time and expertise for the design and successful publication of this inaugural issue.

Watch out for our next issue in September 2019.
FMS Shares Its Research Achievements with Stakeholders

– Ms Shelly-Ann Hunte
Research Fellow, CCHSRD

The Faculty of Medical Sciences (FMS), The University of the West Indies (UWI) hosted its Annual Research Day on March 21st, 2019 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Trinidad and Tobago. A strategic decision was taken to host the Research Day off-campus to encourage the attendance of key stakeholders such as officials from the Ministry of Health and the Regional Health Authorities.

The Research Day provided a forum to share the Faculty’s research findings with the users of research: Health Officials, Medical and Allied Health Practitioners, Civil Society Organisations, and the Private Sector. Several media houses were in attendance and excerpts of the event were featured on the major newscast of TV6 and CNC3. Additionally, the Newsday and Express newspapers published articles that highlighted the research presented.

Professor Seemungal brought greetings to formally open the day’s proceedings, following which Mr. Lawrence Jaisingh, Director of Policy, Research and Planning at the Ministry of Health, presented on the research needs and priorities of the Ministry. The feature
speaker, Professor Michael Clarke, University of Western Ontario, delivered an engaging presentation titled *Equality and Equity in Public Health: Necessary but not Sufficient*.

Eleven oral presentations were delivered by staff as well as the prize winners of the Student Research Days for the Schools of Medicine, Nursing and Veterinary Medicine. Over 75 poster presentations from the five Schools of the FMS, the wider UWI community and the South West Regional Health Authority were on display throughout the day and were highlighted during the dedicated posters sessions.

The abstracts of the papers presented were published in a supplement of the Caribbean Medical Journal (CMJ).

The Research Day culminated with an Awards Ceremony. Awardees were selected by the Dean, FMS and the Director, School of Graduate Studies, Professor Patricia Mohammed based on previously submitted applications.

*The One Health Project* was selected as the Most Impactful Research Project and this award was given to Professor Christopher Oura, School of Veterinary Medicine. Dr Nelleen Baboolal, School of Medicine, also received an award for the *Mitigating the Dementia Tsunami in Trinidad and Tobago Project*. This was adjudged the project with Most Significant Potential. The award for Most Productive Researcher was presented to Dr Rajiv Dahiya, School of Pharmacy.
Eight poster prizes were awarded to the best poster presentations for each Department/School. Two special prizes were also presented. Ms. Fallon Lutchmansingh, Clinical Medical Sciences, received the prize for the best poster that included an IT component for the research project titled *Universal access to screening and management of diabetes in pregnancy in Trinidad using an ICT solution*; and Mr. Mikhail Charles, School of Pharmacy, received the prize for the best Health Policy and Systems Research paper for the project titled *Antibiotic prescribing patterns in the emergency department at the Wendy Fitzwilliam Paediatric Hospital*.

The date for next year’s Research Day is March 26th, 2020 when the FMS is planning to partner with the Ministry of Health, Regional Health Authorities and other Universities to host a National Health Research Conference.
CCHSRD Partners with the Knowledge to Policy Centre to Building Institutional Capacity for Health Policy and Systems Research and Delivery Science

– Dr Andrea Yearwood
Policy Research Specialist, CCHSRD

In February 2018, the World Health Organization’s Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research (AHPSR) launched a call for proposals seeking bids from interested southern-based institutions with teaching and training capacity in HPSR to serve as a lead mentor for enhancing capacity of six mentee institutions (one in each WHO Region). The proposal from the Knowledge to Policy (K2P) Center, American University of Beirut was accepted and the contract for the lead mentor institution was awarded to the K2P Center. The Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development (CCHSRD) was selected as the mentee institution for the Americas Region; CCHSRD signed a Sub-Award Agreement with K2P Center, in September 2018, in the amount of US$ 100,000 to implement project activities over three years.

The mentorship program aims to:
• Develop durable and sustainable capacity for evidence-informed decision-making in health, by ensuring the required skills, incentives and systems are in place.
• Strengthen the capacity of researchers and policymakers and their respective institutions to support evidence-informed decision-making in health.
• Establish and nurture critical links and collaborations between researchers and policymakers.

The project is being executed in three phases:
• Phase 1: Needs assessment to develop customized and tailored capacity-building ‘plans of action’.
• Phase 2: Delivery of customized trainings, curricula and capacity development activities; implementation of a Policy Fellowship Program to strengthen researcher-policymaker exchange and engagement; and completion of a hands-on culminating activity requiring the involvement of policymakers, researchers and other stakeholders.
• Phase 3: Post-training coaching and mentorship to enhance application and sustainability of learning and capacity development initiatives.

The project is currently in Phase 1. To date, Needs Assessment exercises for the CCHSRD (research institution) and for two policymaking institutions in Trinidad and Tobago—the Ministry of Health (MoH), and the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, Inter-Ministerial Social Research Council (IMSRC)—have been completed.

CCHSRD looks forward to continued work with these two agencies as we implement the capacity building plan of action with them.
National Health Research Agenda: A Timely Initiative

– Ms Shelly-Ann Hunte, Research Fellow, CCHSRD

The development of a National Health Research Agenda is a critical step in the strengthening of the health research system of Trinidad and Tobago. The Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development (CCHSRD) is collaborating with the Ministry of Health and other stakeholders, to develop this Agenda.

Research priorities are essential to guide the production of research that can contribute to the strengthening of health systems; to guide research expenditure; to facilitate the achievement of developmental goals; and ultimately to improve health equity and outcomes. Other benefits include the promotion of science, technology and innovation for health and the stimulation of human resource development for research.

The development of the National Health Research Agenda is supported by the Research Sub-Committee of the Cabinet-appointed Senior Joint Planning Committee (SJPC). The Sub-Committee has a mandate to address research related matters being pursued by the Ministries of Health and Education, the Regional Health Authorities and the Faculty of Medical Sciences, The UWI. A concept paper, which outlines a strategic framework for the development of the Agenda and a plan for its implementation, was presented and adopted at the recent meeting of the SJPC.

The methodology for the development of the Agenda was informed by the Council on Health Research for Development (COHRED) Frameworks and Guides for Systems Strengthening.

It includes an assessment of the status of the National Health Research System (NHRS); the determination of the research priorities using the Essential National Health Research (ENHR) Strategy; and the identification of strategies for strengthening the existing attributes of the NHRS. This was determined to be critical to facilitate the conduct and uptake of the identified research. There will also be a plan to enable the periodic Monitoring & Evaluation, review and update of the Agenda.
One Health, One Caribbean, One Love – Caribbean Leadership, Regional Cooperation, Local Action

– Professor Christopher Oura, Project Lead; Professor, Veterinary Virology

Inter-sectoral collaboration is extremely limited, both at policy and technical levels, across the Caribbean region. However, many of the priority health problems currently facing the region, like climate change, food security, ocean health, and emerging diseases arise from the interactions between people, animals and our shared environment. If these health issues are to be addressed effectively and efficiently, an inter-sectoral or One Health approach is clearly required. The European Union funded project “One Health, One Caribbean, One Love” set out to promote and entrench a “One Health” approach to priority health issues affecting humans, animals and ecosystems within the Caribbean region. The project successfully built the capacity of the national veterinary, public health and environmental health services, through the development of a cadre of One Health Leaders, the creation of Caribbean regional and national One Health Networks, and the development of a regional One Health policy and 6-year strategic framework. The One Health policy has been adopted by CARICOM’s Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) as well as the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED).

The One Health leadership series has enabled a core group of One Health Leaders from 12 Caribbean countries to more effectively design and manage One Health policies, programs and projects in order to develop more holistic scientific solutions to emerging health problems at the interface between human, animal and environmental health. Using a train-the-trainer philosophy, over 500 field veterinarians and ‘first responders’ were trained in the recognition and response to key exotic, endemic and zoonotic diseases. Laboratory capacity and capability were also strengthened in veterinary diagnostic laboratories across the region through Quality Assurance and Biosafety training, proficiency testing and the introduction of novel molecular diagnostic techniques into laboratories.

Visit the One Health, One Caribbean, One Love website for more information.
FMS Researchers and Key Stakeholders Trained in Good Clinical Practice

Ms Shelly-Ann Hunte, Research Fellow, CCHSRD

The Faculty of Medical Sciences (FMS), The UWI, in collaboration with Roche Pharmaceuticals, hosted a Clinical Trials Training Workshop on May 3rd – 5th, 2019. The objective was to train a cohort of researchers and health professionals on the basic principles of Good Clinical Practice (GCP) towards the conduct of clinical trials in Trinidad and Tobago.

Workshop participants included representatives from the Research Ethics Committees of The UWI, Eastern Regional Health Authority (ERHA), North West Regional Health Authority (NWRHA), South West Regional Health Authority (SWRHA); Chemistry, Food and Drugs Division, Ministry of Health (MOH); as well as oncologists, nurses and pharmacists from institutions such as the National Radiotherapy Centre, SWRHA, ERHA; and FMS researchers.

The workshop provided an opportunity for key stakeholders to discuss the laws, regulations and requirements for the importation and use of Investigational Medicinal Products (IMPs) in research; to identify the current pathway for Research Ethics Committee(s) approval of protocols involving the use of IMPs; to clarify the existing regulatory process/procedures; as well as to pinpoint key issues that should be addressed in the National Health Research Ethics Policy (which is currently being developed).

Several follow-up activities, including additional training and research funding opportunities, were discussed and the immediate next steps will be deliberated by an Ad Hoc Liaison Committee convened by the Dean, FMS, Professor Terence Seemungal with critical inputs from officials of the Chemistry, Food and Drugs Division, MOH.
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