



**UWI**  
ST. AUGUSTINE CAMPUS  
TRINIDAD & TOBAGO, WEST INDIES

# CCHSRD Newsletter

“Better Health Systems...Healthier Lives”

Vol. 1 | Issue 2 | September 2019



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## Editorial

Caribbean Community  
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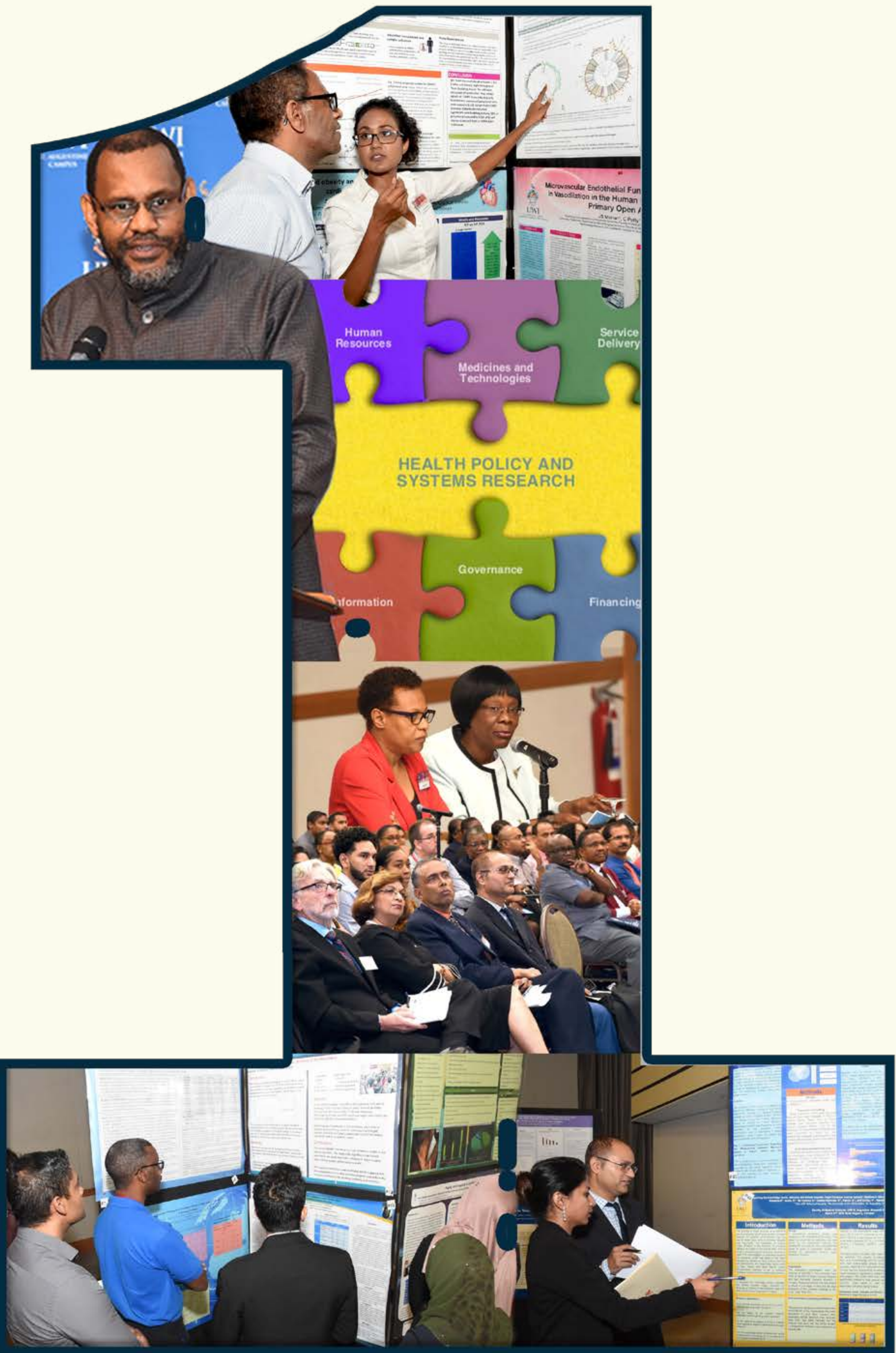
# EDITORIAL

## One Year After its Launch – Exciting Developments at the Centre

A year has passed since the Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development was officially launched on September 14, 2018. Its Advisory Board met shortly afterwards and noted that it would take some time for the Centre to become fully established, especially in light of its limited resources. Albeit, we enthusiastically set about our work and can now share the progress made thus far.

One of the more significant developments in the last 12 months was the receipt of an award from the WHO's Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research for the period 2018-2021. The Alliance was about to launch a global programme to strengthen HPSR capacity and selected the Centre as the focal point for the Region of the Americas. This project is being successfully implemented and includes support for capacity development at the Centre as well as at its partner policymaking institutions.

During this establishment phase, the Centre has been strategically building strong partnerships with key stakeholders through the signing of MOUs. Partners include academic institutions such as the McMaster Health Forum and the Anton de Kom University of Suriname, inter alia, as well as government agencies, notably the Ministry of Health, Trinidad and Tobago. An MOU with the Ministry of Public Health, Guyana is about to be signed. These MOUs have already begun to bear fruit with the implementation of collaborative initiatives.





# One Year After its Launch - Exciting Developments at the Centre

Other notable highlights of the Centre's work since its launch include:

- The establishment of the Caribbean Community of Practice for Health Policy and Systems Research. This has proven to be a very effective facility to bring all the key stakeholders together to build capacity and to support each other in addressing HPSR challenges. The Community already has over 60 active members throughout the Caribbean.
- In March 2019, the Centre coordinated the largest research conference that the Faculty of Medical Sciences has hosted in recent times. Research findings with critical health policy and system strengthening implications were presented to a lively audience of over 200 delegates. Its success has led to plans for the hosting of the first ever National Health Research Conference in Trinidad and Tobago, which will be co-hosted with the Ministry of Health and other key health sector and academic partners.
- Consistent with its mandate, the Centre has been providing timely support to researchers at the FMS through the conduct of training workshops and the provision of technical assistance with their research studies. This is expected to significantly increase the production of health policy-relevant research at The UWI.

Although we are making progress, the Centre's work is limited by resource constraints – both human and financial. However, we are pleased that the staff complement has grown in the last year and we now have a Policy Research

Specialist, Research Fellow, Research Assistant and Clerical Assistant on board. We have also been leveraging our partnerships, which have been able to provide us with supplementary resources and support, though not always financial. Regarding the latter, we are assiduously seeking grant funding that would provide the additional resources needed to fully implement our work plan. Unfortunately, since we are located in a World Bank designated High-Income Country, we are disqualified from many funding opportunities. This has made fund raising even more challenging, but we remain resolute in our efforts to secure appropriate research grants.

As I reflect on the last year and look to the future, I must humbly accept our blessings. We would not have made the progress without the support from the Faculty of Medical Sciences, in particular the Dean, Professor Terence Seemungal. It is also important to highlight our appreciation for our partners, both academic institutions and Ministries of Health, which have shown a considerable level of confidence in what we are doing and continue to support our work. Finally, I must express my gratitude to the Centre's staff, Dr Andrea Yearwood, Ms Shelly-Ann Hunte, Ms Nikisha Headley and Ms Kershelle Barker for their commitment and hard work.

The work continues...

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

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



## Editorial

### **Caribbean Community of Practice for Health Policy and Systems Research**

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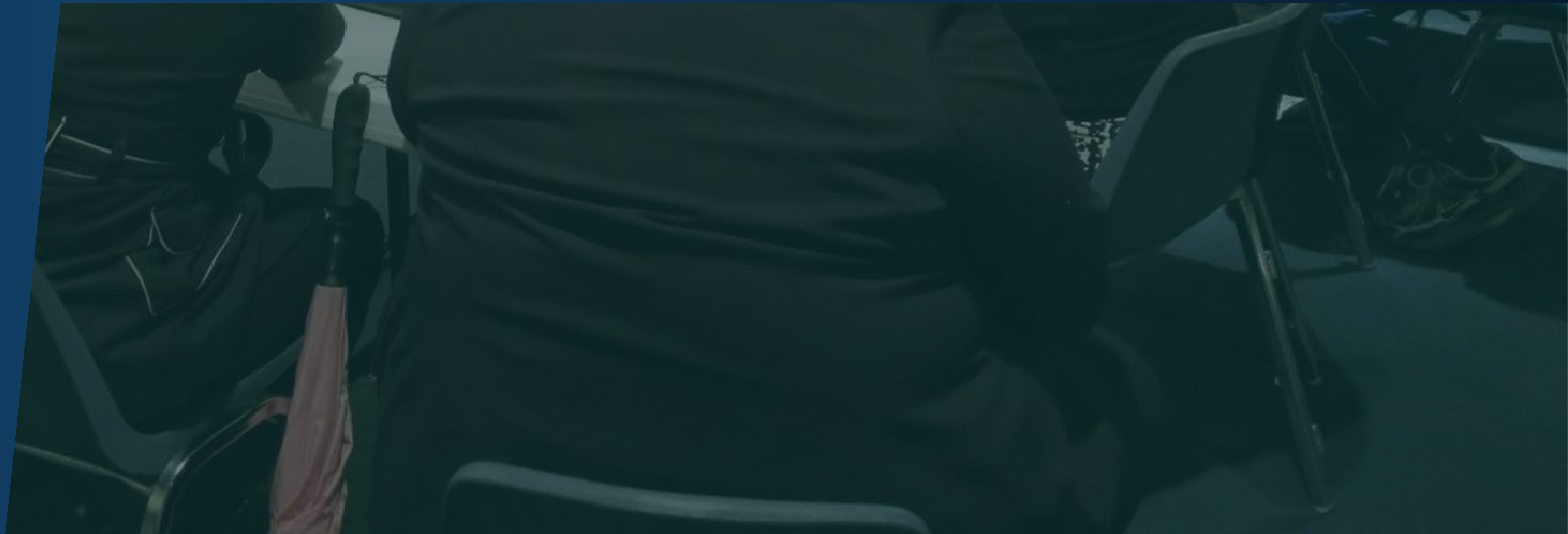
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# The Caribbean Community of Practice for Health Policy and Systems Research





# Caribbean Community of Practice for Health Policy and Systems Research

## A Vehicle to Strengthen the Conduct and Uptake of HPSR in the Caribbean

- *Dr Andrea Yearwood*  
*Policy Research Specialist, CCHSRD*

Communities of Practice comprise people who share a passion about a topic and interact on an ongoing basis to deepen their understanding and expertise. The Caribbean Community of Practice for Health Policy and Systems Research (CoP4HPSR) is a recently established network of researchers, health professionals, policymakers, and stakeholders, who are committed to improving health systems in the Caribbean.

CoP4HPSR is dedicated to capacity building, knowledge sharing, connecting researchers from different disciplines, and providing an open environment for dialogue and collaboration between health decisionmakers and researchers. Members of CoP4HPSR share information about learning opportunities, calls for research funding proposals, upcoming events, job opportunities as well as technical content in the field of health policy and systems research. Members also collaborate on joint research.





Caribbean Community of Practice for Health Policy and Systems Research

# A Vehicle to Strengthen the Conduct and Uptake of HPSR in the Caribbean

The work of CoP4HPSR will be guided by the needs of CARICOM policymakers. In a recent survey, Chief Medical Officers were asked to rank the elements of the health system on which the CoP4HPSR should focus. Issues related to health information, human resources for health and health financing were the top three areas identified.

Since its establishment over the past two months, a number of HPSR-related alerts have been disseminated to CoP4HPSR members. The Community is growing and you are invited to become a member now, for valuable updates and opportunities in the field of HPSR.

**Membership to CoP4HPSR is free and is open to researchers and health professionals from the Caribbean, who have an interest in HPSR.**

**Top Three health system areas CoP4HPSR should focus on**  
Feedback from fifteen (15) CARICOM Chief Medical Officers



1

**Health Information**



2

**Health Workforce**



3

**Health Financing**

**Not yet a Member?**  
**Look at all you've missed!**



Call for Abstracts: Inequities in health and health systems in LAC  
Event Alert & Call for Abstracts: Canadian Pre-Congress with LAC Perspective  
Call for Abstracts: NWRHA Research Day 2019  
Event Alert & Call for Abstracts: Diversification in the Era of Non-Normal  
Event Alert: AIB-LAC 10th Annual Conference  
Training Opportunity: Understanding and Strengthening Health Systems  
Call for Abstracts: Publication Mentorship for Women in HPSR  
Scholarships & New Deadline: Caribbean HSG Pre-Conference  
Training Opportunity: Effective Literature Searching  
Call for Abstracts: HSR2020 in Dubai  
Join Health Systems Global for FREE!



## Editorial

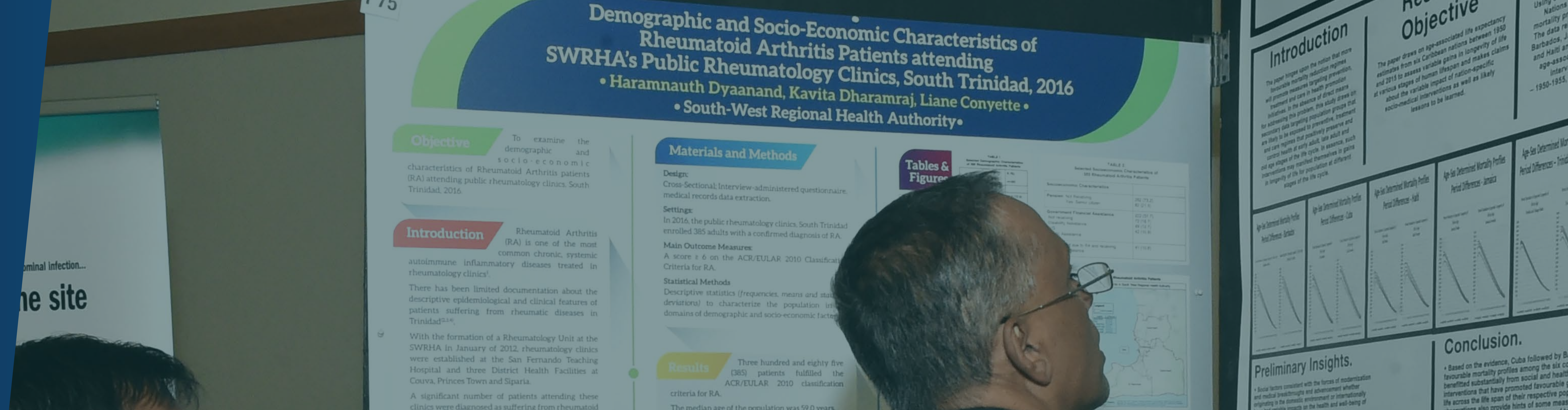
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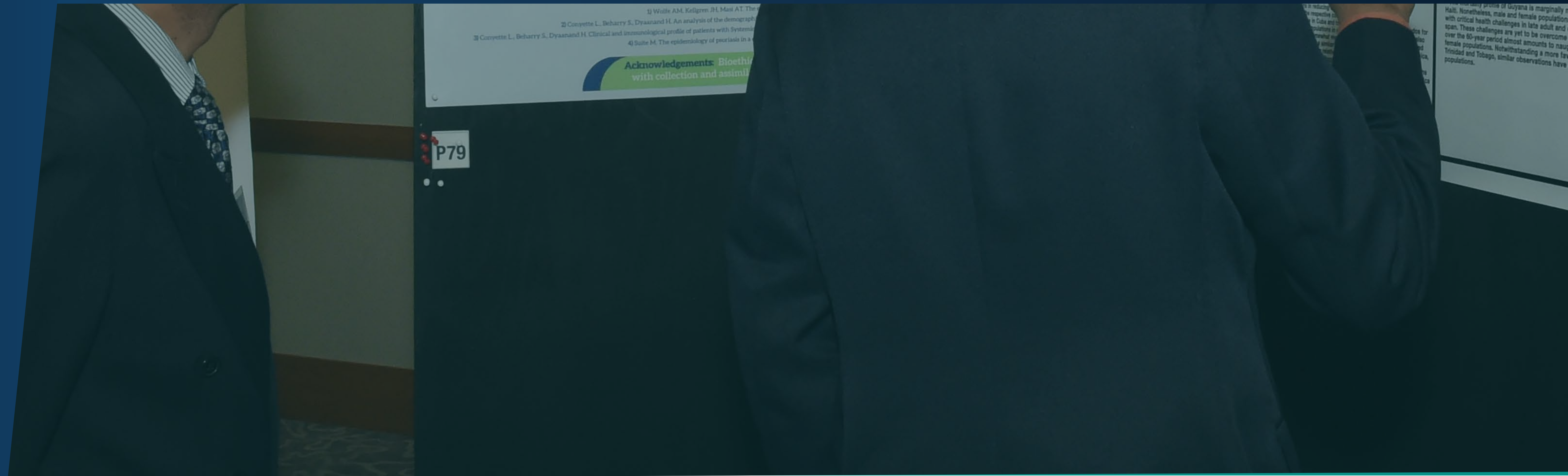
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# Trinidad and Tobago to Host its First National Health Research Conference





# Trinidad and Tobago to Host its First National Health Research Conference

## Advancing Health Research in Trinidad & Tobago

- Ms Shelly-Ann Hunte  
Research Fellow, CCHSRD

After the successful hosting of the 2019 Faculty of Medical Sciences (FMS) Research Day, the Dean, Professor Terence Seemungal proposed its expansion to a national event i.e. to share the forum with other academic institutions and health sector partners. On invitation, these stakeholders responded positively. Consequently, the FMS, UWI will partner with the Ministry of Health, Tobago House of Assembly, Regional Health Authorities, University of Trinidad and Tobago and University of the Southern Caribbean to host Trinidad and Tobago's first National Health Research Conference. The Conference will be held on March 26<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel and a one-day research skills training workshop will precede the event (March 25<sup>th</sup>). An Inter-Organization Committee has been convened to facilitate planning and coordination.

The theme of the 2020 National Health Research Conference is "Advancing Health Research" and quality research in all health areas can be submitted for presentation e.g. Public Health, Clinical Studies, Environmental Health, Biomedical Research, Communicable and Non-Communicable Diseases, Nutrition, Health Economics, Social and Behavioural Health Sciences, etc.



The Conference will provide a forum to disseminate indigenous research evidence and to share clinical, policy and programmatic relevant messages with the users of research. Additional benefits include strengthening the national health research culture, nurturing junior researchers, and fostering collaboration among researchers at different institutions.

Awards will be given to recognize outstanding Trinidad and Tobago researchers and there will also be prizes based on the research presented at the Conference.

**The deadline for submission of abstracts is November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019.**



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## Remarkably High Rates of Dementia in the Elderly in Trinidad





# Research Highlight

## Remarkably High Rates of Dementia in the Elderly in Trinidad

- *Dr Gershwin Davis*<sup>1</sup>, *Dr Nelleen Baboolal*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Head, Para-Clinical Sciences, FMS, UWI, St. Augustine

<sup>2</sup>Head, Clinical Medical Sciences, FMS, UWI, St. Augustine

A recent publication in the *British Medical Journal Open* on the findings from the Trinidad dementia prevalence study reported unexpectedly high rates in the elderly. Indeed, the researchers found that of 1832 community-based participants aged 70 years and older, dementia was present in 442 (23.4%). Prevalences were 12.0% in persons aged 70-74 years, 23.5% at 75-79, 25.8% at 80-84, 41.3% at 85-89, and 54.0% in those aged 90 years or older. These rates were higher than expected, particularly at the lower end of the 70+ age range. Projected national numbers of people with dementia (18,206) were 70-100% higher than those estimated using *regional consensus rates*. Dementia was also found to be associated with reported stroke and diabetes.

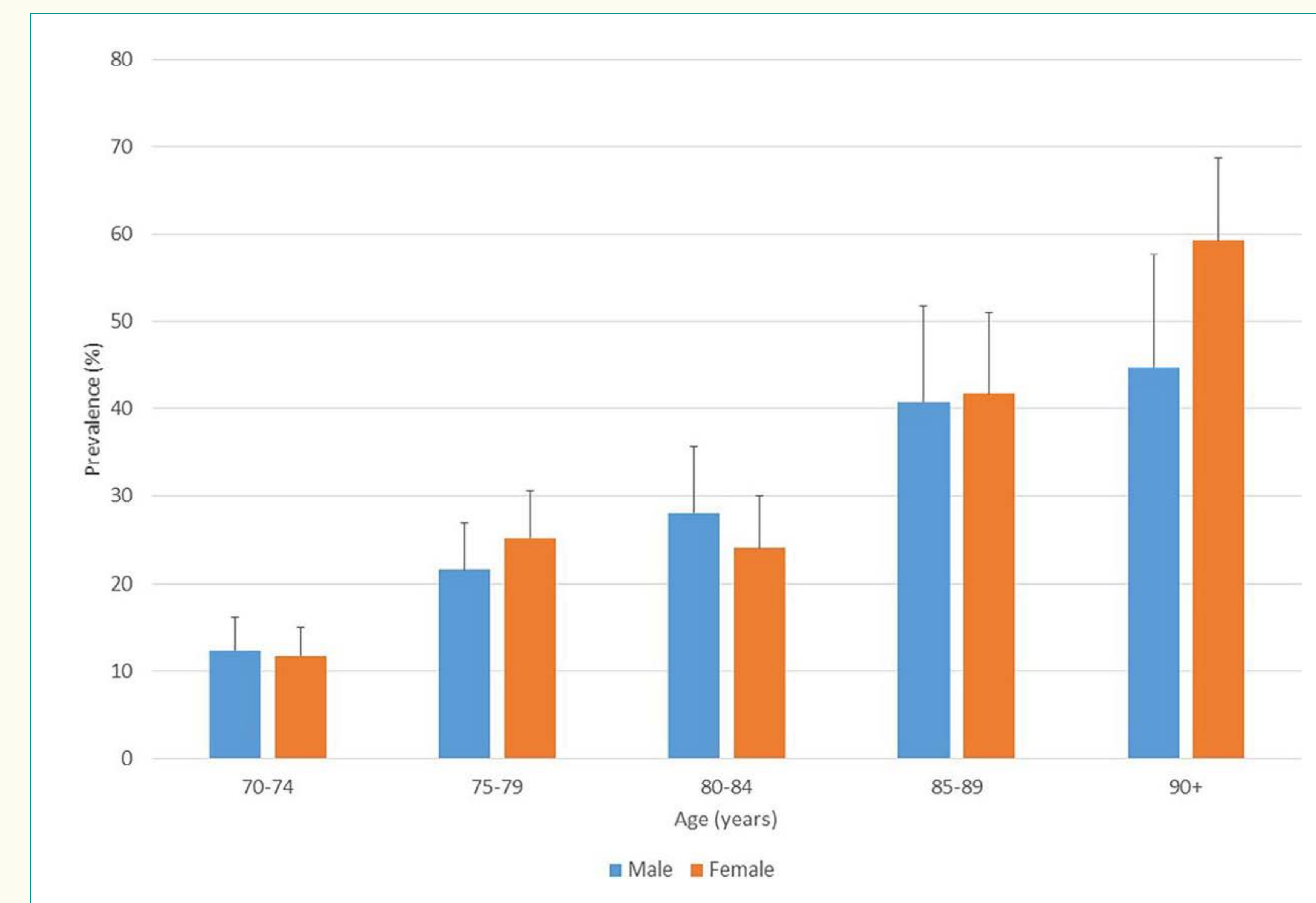


*Dr Gershwin Davis*



*Dr Nelleen Baboolal*

*Principal Investigators, National Dementia Study on Aging*



Dementia prevalence (%) by age and gender (with upper 95% CI).



# Remarkably High Rates of Dementia in the Elderly in Trinidad

Dementia is a chronic condition that affects mainly the elderly population. More than 60% is due to Alzheimer's disease (AD), 17% is due to vascular dementia and 10% is due to mixed (AD and vascular) dementia. This disease is burdensome with a long history of decline which may extend over 10 years, eventually resulting in the individual becoming bedridden, not recognizing even close relatives and needing total care. Dementia affects not only the individual but the caregiver as well. Non-modifiable risk factors are age, sex and genetic factors. Potentially modifiable risk factors for dementia include cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes mellitus type 2, obesity, psychosocial factors such as depression, and health behaviours including low level of physical or mental activity and smoking. Up to half of dementia cases worldwide may be attributable to these potentially modifiable risk factors.

It is notable that the 2011 Pan-American STEPS chronic non-communicable disease risk factor survey in Trinidad and Tobago reported that 65% of residents aged 45-64 years had at least 3 of 5 risk factors. The latter included smoking, obesity, hypertension, poor diet and low exercise. Further research is needed to clarify any links between these risk factors and increased dementia prevalence in this population.

*(Right) Prof. Robert Stewart conducts a training workshop for field workers who collected data in the national prevalence study*

*(Below) Dr Baboolal and Dr Davis conduct training workshops*



*(Right) Field workers on the move while collecting data for the nationwide prevalence study*

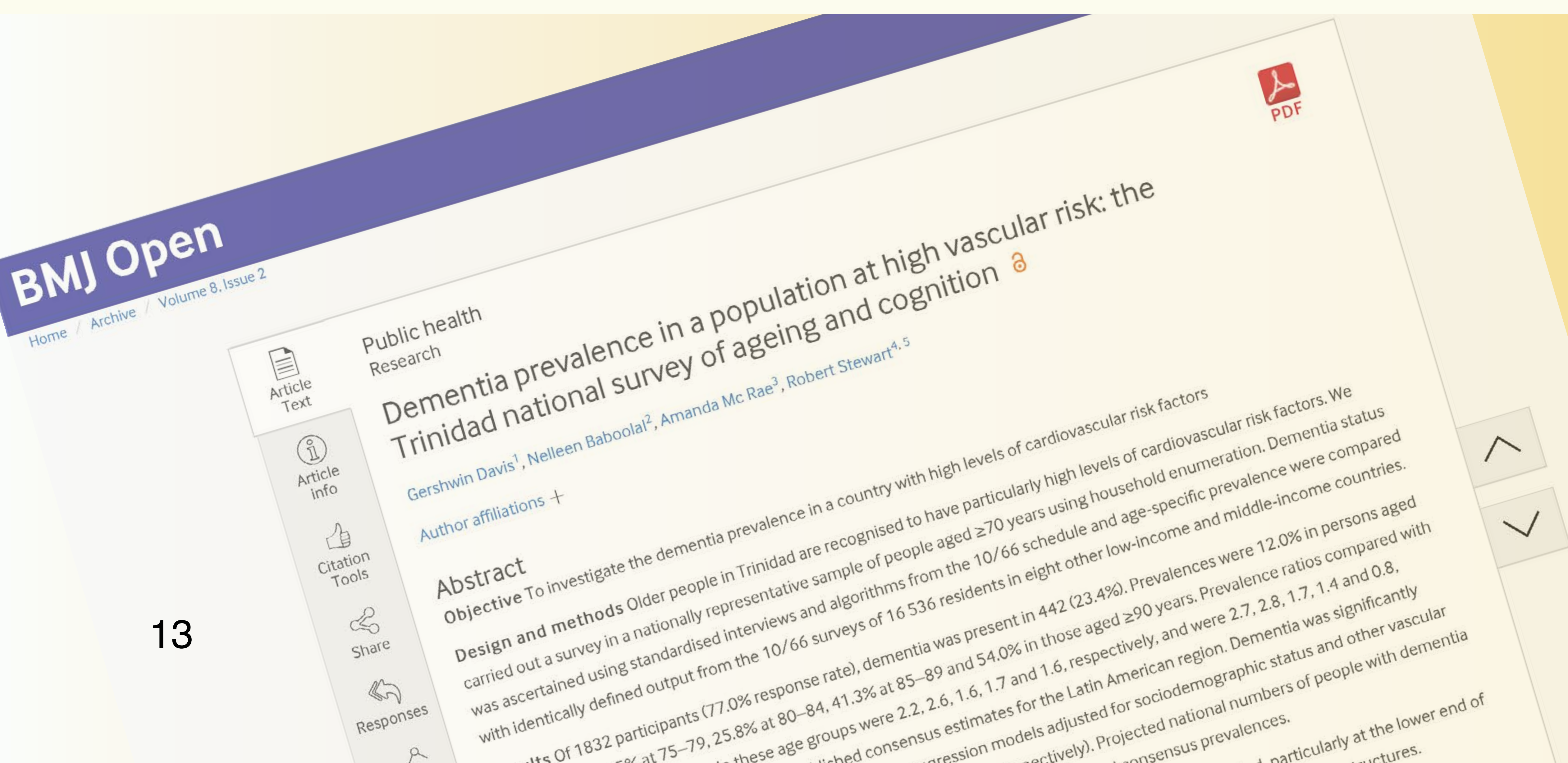




# Remarkably High Rates of Dementia in the Elderly in Trinidad

With the finding of high dementia prevalence in Trinidad with its high level of vascular risk factors, there is an urgent need for the development of a national dementia plan. Consideration should be given to promoting a dementia friendly society i.e. one in which infrastructure is accommodating; there is public education aimed at reducing modifiable risk factors; and there is enabling social interaction that decreases stigmatization.

The CCHSRD is providing support to develop knowledge management products such as policy briefs to effectively communicate these findings to policy makers and other decision makers.



## Dementia prevalence in a population at high vascular risk: The Trinidad national survey of ageing and cognition

### Authors

Gershwin Davis, Nalleen Baboolal, Amanda Mc Rae, Robert Stewart

doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2017-018288



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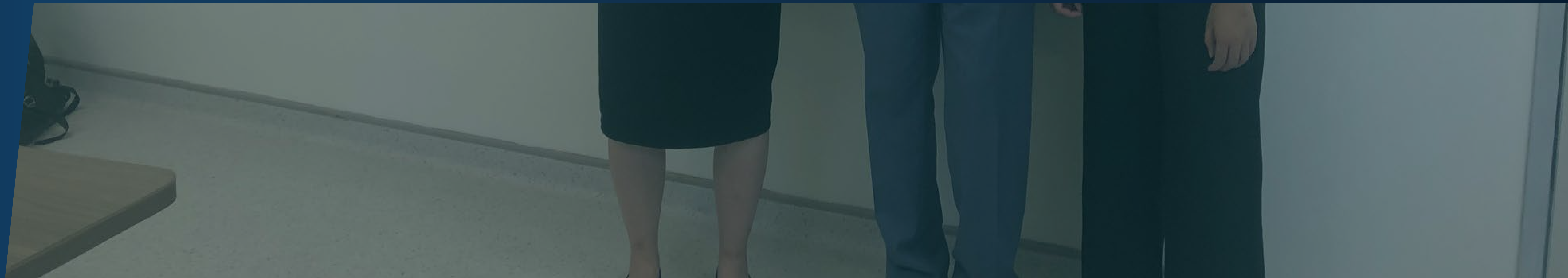
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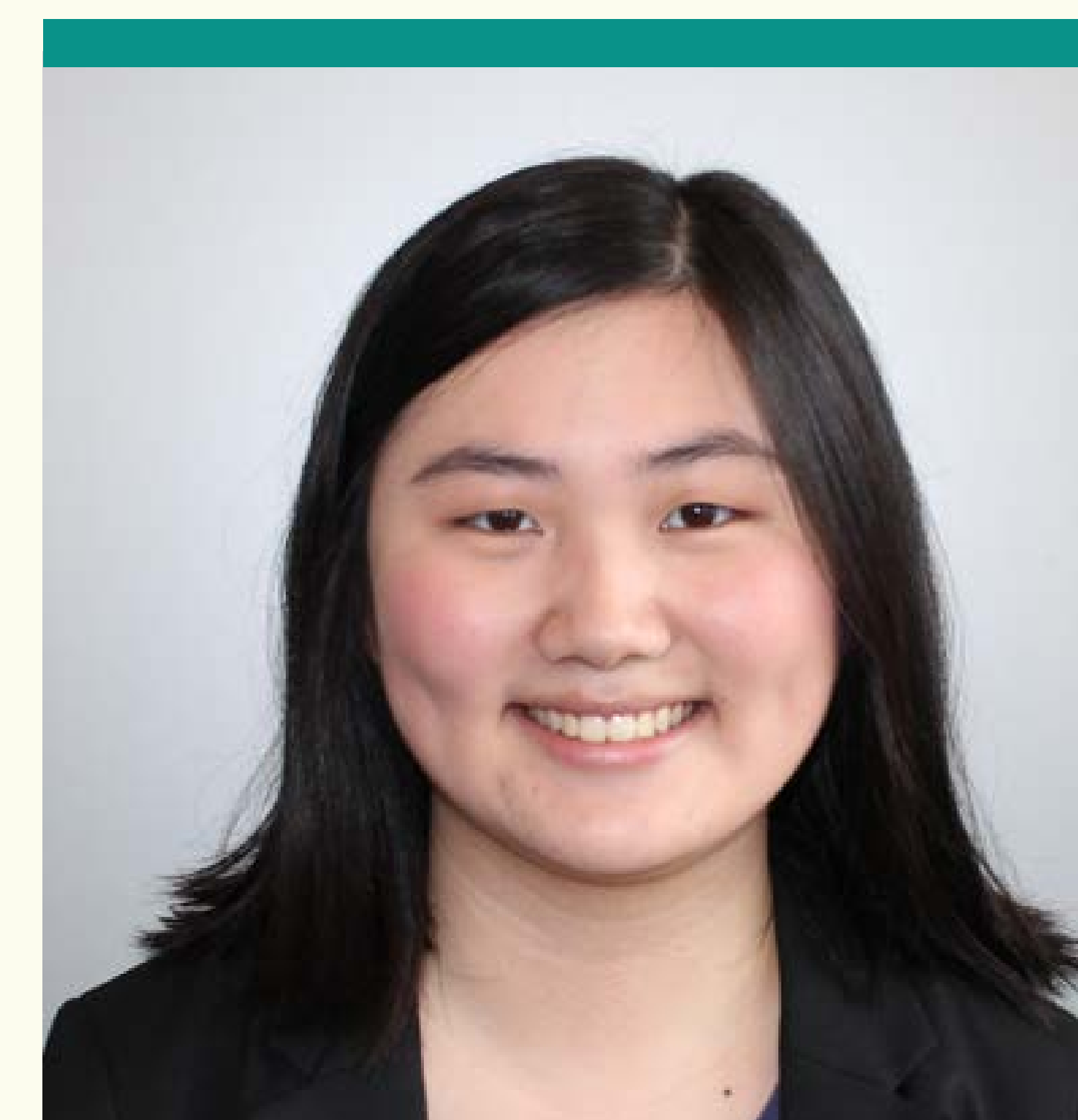
## McMaster Interns Contribute to HPSR in the Caribbean

- *Ms Kershelle Barker*  
Research Assistant, CCHSRD

Earlier this year, the CCHSRD formalized its collaboration with the McMaster Health Forum (MHF) of McMaster University, Canada with the signing of an MOU. The Centre has been utilizing such MOUs to build networks that promote evidence-informed decision making, and facilitate an increase in the uptake of research findings to strengthen health systems and policymaking in the Caribbean.

The MHF hosts the annual Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Program which provides internship opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students interested in international health and social systems strengthening. Two such scholars, Ms. Christie Tan and Ms. Hanna Serrano, were matched to the CCHSRD to complete their internship from May 1 to July 30, 2019.

We spoke with the interns about their work at the Centre and their experience in Trinidad and Tobago:



*MHF Interns - L: Ms Christie Tan, R: Ms Hannah Serrano*

**CCHSRD:** Tell us about the Health Policy and Systems Research (HPSR) activities you have been engaged in during your internship.



**Christie Tan & Hannah Serrano:**

Over the course of the internship, we were fortunate to work on several different projects under the direction of Dr. Andrea Yearwood. We were first tasked with conducting a



# McMaster Interns Contribute to HPSR in the Caribbean

literature review to support the development of a pilot rapid response service for the Centre. We looked into the use, benefits and implementation of successful services in other countries such as the one in our home institution, the MHF, to get a sense of what could be adopted at the CCHSRD. We also developed a draft proposal to advocate for more civic voices in policy processes. We are hoping this will help support the CCHSRD to host deliberations that meaningfully engage citizens, civil society organizations and stakeholders on important policy issues, such as challenges in the implementation of Universal Health Coverage. Another project was to prepare material for a draft evidence brief to explore potential solutions to decrease oral health inequalities in Trinidad and Tobago.



Our draft proposal addresses the need to involve citizens in policy-making by inviting them to participate in dialogues related to decision making. These dialogues will be supported by research evidence and will include the participation of policy-makers in order to better assess policy options in a holistic manner. We also worked briefly on developing materials for a policy training course.



In what ways do you believe the work done during your internship can contribute to CCHSRD’s HPSR agenda to facilitate evidence-informed decision making?



When established, the CCHSRD’s rapid response service will support key decision-makers by providing timely access to high quality research evidence, tailored specifically to their requests.



We were briefly introduced to frameworks to analyze policy options (i.e. their benefits, harms, cost-effectiveness and implementation strategies) in our health policy classes at MHF. However, our internship challenged us to look at policy options beyond these frameworks, and also think about local applicability and adaptations that would be most appropriate for a Caribbean setting. Learning how to apply these concepts to real world situations was important to us and allowed us to broaden our view of health policy. We learned a lot about the importance of context in suggesting policy options that are most relevant and viable, and as such developed skills regarding how to interrogate a problem in order to design effective solutions.





# McMaster Interns Contribute to HPSR in the Caribbean

What has been the highlight of your time spent in Trinidad, and at the CCHSRD?

“

**Christie:**

This summer allowed me to grow personally and expand on my skillset. Prior to the internship at the CCHSRD, I was exposed to health policy and health research in a more theoretical way through classes or being associated with the McMaster Health Forum. I did not have the opportunity to apply it and gain hands-on experience. Being able to practice these concepts in real-life, and also on projects that are of importance for the Ministry of Health was eye-opening and was the most rewarding aspect of the work I did at the CCHSRD.

In terms of leisure, there were so many amazing weekends we spent exploring cities, cultural sites, and eating a LOT of food. However, swimming with bioluminescent plankton at night on a boat ride in Tobago was an unforgettable experience.

**Hannah:**

The highlight of my time at the CCHSRD was the opportunity to present on the projects that we were working on throughout the past three months to the staff. It was exciting to be able to share our findings and discuss efforts that will help enhance the CCHSRD's capacity to strengthen health systems in the Caribbean. Overall, the presentation was a great way to conclude our internship.

Outside of work, we were fortunate enough to witness Emancipation Day in Port of Spain on our last day in Trinidad, which was a remarkable experience due to its great historical significance.

”



Christie and Hannah enjoyed sightseeing in Trinidad & Tobago, including visits to the San Fernando City Hall and Port of Spain Waterfront (pictured above).



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## CCHSRD Research Training Workshops Launched





# CCHSRD Research Training Workshops Launched

## Building Capacity in Multi-level Modelling and Regression Analysis

- *Ms Nikisha Headley*  
*Clerical Assistant, CCHSRD*

The CCHSRD has embarked on a series of training workshops to strengthen research capacity within the Faculty of Medical Sciences. The initiative was launched in June 2019 with a Data Analysis Mini-Workshop. Sessions were facilitated by Dr Novie Younger-Coleman, Senior Lecturer at the Caribbean Institute for Health Research, UWI, Mona, a statistician with over 20 years' experience.

Participants comprised academic staff from the five Schools of the FMS as well as from other Faculties across The UWI, St. Augustine.

The mini-workshop was hosted over two sessions and included:

1. Introduction to Multi-level (Hierarchical Data) Modelling using the Stata Software;
2. More Complete Answers to Research Questions: Transition from Bivariate Analysis to Regression Analysis. This included examining data with bivariate analyses as well as simple and multiple regression, using the SPSS Software.



*Dr Novie Younger-Coleman presenting on Day 1 of the Data Analysis Mini-Workshop*



# Building Capacity in Multi-level Modelling and Regression Analysis

Both sessions included an overview lecture that briefly introduced the topics. This was followed by the use of data to illustrate the application of the statistical software to conduct the analyses. Participants were also invited to individual meetings with Dr Younger-Coleman for consultation on their data analyses.

This mini-workshop was successful and participants indicated their eagerness to participate in future training sessions. Basic training in the Reference Management software and in SPSS will follow next in the series.



*(Left and Top) Participants on Day 1 and Day 2 of the Data Analysis Mini-Workshop at the Faculty of Medical Sciences, UWI, St Augustine*

*(Top Right) Dr Younger-Coleman and Professor Simeon, Director of the CCHSRD*

*(Right) Dr Younger-Coleman assists a mini-workshop participant with data analysis*







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