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NIH commits \$36M to train junior faculty in Africa

To encourage junior faculty at African academic institutions to pursue research careers, the National Institutes of Health is awarding up to \$36.5 million over five years in the next phase of the Medical Education Partnership Initiative (MEPI). Sub-Saharan Africa bears almost a quarter of the global disease burden, yet has only 3 percent of the world's health workforce, according to the World Health Organization. Since 2010, MEPI awards have been transforming medical education across the region by strengthening curricula, upgrading community-based training sites, and expanding communications technology and e-learning resources. Some funding has also been devoted to providing faculty with dedicated research time and other incentives designed to promote retention, but many junior level staff lack the necessary resources to incorporate research into their careers.



NIH is investing \$36.5 million to support junior faculty career development in the next phase of the Medical Education Partnership Initiative (MEPI). Photos by Richard Lord for Fogarty/NIH.

“Research must play an integral part in generating sustainable, quality health care in sub-Saharan Africa, which is the ultimate goal,” said NIH Director, Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D. “It is critical that we increase research capacity so Africans can carry out locally relevant investigations themselves, and develop the necessary expertise in areas such as bioethics, informatics, environmental science, and genomics. That will empower their participation in international collaborations.”

MEPI was designed to increase the number of skilled health care workers and strengthen the scientific base in countries supported by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which provided

significant funding in MEPI's initial phase. In addition to developing much-needed human resources to diagnose and treat patients, the program helped enable evidence-based decision making to improve the effectiveness and impact of the U.S. investment. It is also intended to cultivate scientists who can determine the most efficient ways to expand the treatment platform built for HIV/AIDS to address other illnesses, including the chronic diseases that are a growing cause of disability and death in the region.

“Many junior faculty in African institutions struggle to incorporate research into their careers. These new awards will support advanced training and provide dedicated time so they can conduct investigations that will lay the groundwork for fundable proposals,” said Dr. Roger I. Glass, director of the Fogarty International Center, part of NIH. “Through these training opportunities, African physicians and investigators can prepare themselves to become the next generation of African research leaders.”

Sub-Saharan Africa has 12.5 percent of the world's population but produces less than 1 percent of the global research output, according to the World Bank. MEPI is designed to foster the level of science, analytical ability and writing skills that will increase the quantity and quality of published journal articles with African authorship.

In 11 awards to grantees in eight countries, this new MEPI funding round will support junior faculty training in research management, methodology, ethics, mentorship, preparation of scientific publications and grant writing. This program will strengthen the research culture of grantee institutions and facilitate broader support for junior faculty collaborations that will help sustain and expand progress made in the initial term of the MEPI program. Faculty trainees will develop new skills in the research fields most relevant to their communities and bring cutting-edge expertise to their institutions, allowing their scientists to increase their participation in global and regional research collaborations.

The funded projects all incorporate research on HIV/AIDS and noncommunicable diseases or risk factors. For instance, the University of Zimbabwe is targeting cardiovascular disease, mental health and women's health, while the University of Jos in Nigeria plans to tackle two cancers with a high national burden—breast and prostate cancers—as well as reproductive health and genomics. The University of Nairobi in Kenya is targeting mental conditions and maternal, newborn and child health, while Uganda's Makerere University plans to examine HIV/AIDS-associated co-infections, other infectious diseases including malaria, and noncommunicable diseases.

Training approaches vary among the grantee institutions. Mozambique's Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, for instance, will develop and strengthen its master's- and doctoral-level curricula, including a new Ph.D. in biomedical sciences research, while the University of Lagos will establish master's programs in neuroscience, community medicine, genomics and bioinformatics. The University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa plans to create an accelerated leadership track for 20 faculty, including those from rural areas, while Ethiopia's Addis Ababa University will train 24 faculty members and simultaneously develop the institution's research infrastructure. Tanzania's Kilimanjaro's Christian Medical Center's grant aims to develop 18 independent scientists and make their training program an institution staple.

Joining Fogarty as funding partners are the NIH Common Fund; Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development; National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute; National Institute of Dental

and Craniofacial Research; National Institute of Mental Health; National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke; National Institute of Nursing Research; National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities; Office of AIDS Research; and Office of Research on Women's Health.

[Full list of awards](#)

The Fogarty International Center addresses global health challenges through innovative and collaborative research and training programs and supports and advances the NIH mission through international partnerships. For more information, visit <http://www.fic.nih.gov>.

About the National Institutes of Health (NIH): NIH, the nation's medical research agency, includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIH is the primary federal agency conducting and supporting basic, clinical, and translational medical research, and is investigating the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit www.nih.gov.

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