

OPTIMIZE

This is a monthly update shared with all members involved in Project OPTIMIZE, and is meant to provide a short update of major achievements, challenges, and plans for the future. Please submit any inputs to Celia Serenata before the 1st Wednesday of every month.

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS FROM DECEMBER 2016

UNITAID GRANT

- The UNITAID grant to Wits RHI and its consortium partners – Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), the Southern African HIV Clinicians Society (SAHCS), St. Stephen’s AIDS Trust (SSAT), and the University of Cape Town (UCT), was signed at the beginning of December. In addition Wits RHI will be engaging HIV i-Base to render support to the TAC, SAHCS and Wits RHI in community engagement activities. (See http://www.wrhi.ac.za/uploads/files/161201_Press_Release_Wits_RHI_Receive_Grant_to_Speed_Up_Access_to_Critical_HIV_Drugs_UTD_comments.pdf)
- Since the UNITAID agreement was signed, Wits RHI has been working hard on putting in place the contracting mechanisms for these consortium partners, as well as the vendors to the ADVANCE (WRHI060) study – Bliss Pharmaceuticals (for procuring study drugs), BARC Labs and Triclinium Clinical Development (TCD), the contract research organisation (CRO) for ADVANCE. These vendor services are co-funded by UNITAID and USAID.
- Wits RHI had a meeting with TAC to discuss the UNITAID grant and confirm lines of accountability
- In 2017 as of the end of January, we will include updates from the new UNITAID-funded partners in this monthly update.

LOW-DOSE DARUNAVIR STUDY, Wits RHI

- As of the end of December, there were 200 participants screened and 163 enrolled in the low-dose DRV (WRHI052) study
- Recruitment strategies continue to be reviewed and amended where necessary to improve participant numbers
- Retention:
 - Visit 1 Completed = 133/138 (96%)
 - Visit 2 Completed = 80/81 (99%)



Upcoming Events

9-10 January: ADVANCE Site Investigator Meeting

11-12 January: Site Readiness Visits; following which enrollment will commence

23-25 January: USAID site visit to the 3 ADVANCE sites, JPPM, and CoAg meetings

Important Contacts

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- Visit 3 Completed = 7/7 (100%)

ADVANCE STUDY, Wits RHI

- On 8 and 9 December we received the major regulatory approvals i.e. the MCC and Wits Ethics Committee (HREC) approval for the ADVANCE protocol version 2.0; and the approval from the District Research Committee.
- Most of December was focused on gaining momentum in getting everything in place for the start of the ADVANCE study in January – with the site investigator meeting and site readiness visits occurring the week of 9 January.
- Over the last 3 weeks, the close collaborative efforts between Wits RHI and TCD have been essential in verifying that all site and study related processes are well documented for a successful, smooth study start. These processes included key areas around participant accrual and retention, communications, site operations, data and the pharmacy dispensing study drugs. SOPs and detailed study plans were shared, discussed and reviewed to ensure that the study is conducted with strict adherence to participant care and quality outcomes. These areas will further be presented and discussed at the site investigator meeting.
- During the week of the 12 December we finally received the study drug (F-TAF/Descovy) from Gilead, and it is now in the pharmacy, ready for dispensing.
- The study drug (DTG) from ViiV was unfortunately stuck in customs; as the SARS clearance process took much longer than originally anticipated. Clearance was however granted just before the closure of the Wits RHI office on 23 December. On the 28 December the bottles were transferred to the drug labelling vendor, and will be ready for dispensing in due course for study start.
- The study statutory insurance coverage was accepted and submitted on 23 December, effective from 01 January until study end.
- Though systematic processes are in place for the commencement of the study in January, with *the first participant visit anticipated on 12 January* – we are still struggling to recruit a few critical positions, notably doctors. Despite this challenge, the team has been hard at work preparing all the staff for site initiation.
- Wits RHI and CHAI met with pharmaceutical manufacturers in December to share information about the potential introduction of DTG into the 2018 ARV tender, and for them to share filing updates. With this information, CHAI will prepare a report to the National Department of Health (NDOH) to supplement the recommendations from the ARV Tender Technical Working Group (TWG). The NDOH provided initial feedback on the recommendations, and will now be circulated to the TWG for final comments and submission back to the NDOH for approval.
- The South African Medical Journal advocacy piece on ADVANCE was published online on 28 December (see link in the Outputs section). The major coup was that government officials were co-authors on the paper. The print version is out in January.



MARKET ACCESS AND PRODUCT INTRODUCTION, ICAP

Country-level Activities:

- Conducted a final review of the South Africa needs assessment; and initiated plans for the Mozambique needs assessment
- Finalized the Country Operational Plan (COP) introduction to OPTIMIZE and shared it with

various ICAP country directors

- Held phone calls with ICAP country directors in Zimbabwe, Cote d'Ivoire, and DRC to share information about the project and its inclusion in the COP planning process

Documents and Tools Development

- Finalised the Impact Overview document
- Held discussions with a web development firm to review the initial concept for the country-level online impact calculator
- Completed two drafts of the Market Shaping Strategy
- Re-conceptualised the case study documents to focus on lessons learned from specific key countries

Collaborations

- Connected with CHAI multiple times to discuss the collaboration between OPTIMIZE and Project OPTIMAL in Kenya, specifically around new product introduction and the intersection of the DTG pilot and an assessment (see below).
- Coordinated with the APWG to arrange for ICAP's participation in future meetings.
- Shared a key finding regarding procurement and packaging with CII to share on the supplier-buyer summit call.

Early Adopter/Pilot Assessments

- Development two proposals for enhanced monitoring – one on the DTG pilot in Kenya and one using existing WHO tools to monitor pregnancy and birth outcomes in Botswana – to accommodate OGAC's request for faster, more agile assessments
- Attended a call with CHAI, WHO, USAID and UNITAID to discuss ICAP's role as WHO rolls out enhanced monitoring tools.

EFAVIRENZ 400mg TB PK STUDY (SSAT062), Mylan (St. Stephen's AIDS Trust)

UK

- Recruitment started, screening ongoing

Uganda

- Ethics submission ongoing

EFAVIRENZ 400mg PREGNANCY PK STUDY (SSAT063), Mylan (St. Stephen's AIDS Trust)¹

- Recruitment is going well in Uganda, and a few extra patients have been identified in London

¹ This study is not funded through OPTIMIZE, but is included here as a point of interest

NANOTECHNOLOGY, University of Liverpool

- *In vivo* work was completed on two formulations of darunavir/ritonavir at different ratios.

NOVEL FORMULATION, Mylan

- Mylan is still on track for a Q2 2017 filing of TAF + FTC + DTG, and Q3 2017 for DRV/r + DTG

MARKET ACCESS, Medicines Patent Pool (MPP)

- Two of MPP's licensees, Cipla and Mylan, were the first generic companies to apply for WHO prequalification of the DTG 50mg tablet
- Currently 9 MPP licensees are developing DTG as an active pharmaceutical ingredient and in formulations, and will submit dossiers to the WHO PQ programme and/or the US FDA

See <http://www.medicinespatentpool.org/the-medicines-patent-pool-announces-first-world-health-organization-prequalification-submissions-for-generic-dolutegravir/> for more information

MAJOR PLANS FOR JANUARY 2017

LOW-DOSE DARUNAVIR STUDY, Wits RHI

- Continue enrolment, including expanding the recruitment from additional sites in Johannesburg (e.g. Themba Lethu clinic)

ADVANCE, Wits RHI

- Start ADVANCE on 12 January. There is a potential that the Minister of Health could attend the first day of study start – but this will not be confirmed until 9 January.
- The ARV Tender TWG recommendations will be submitted to the NDOH – this relates to the introduction of DTG, TAF, EFV400 and DRV/r into guidelines and the ARV tender as it relates to adult treatment. Wits RHI and CHAI will now coordinate a call in January for paediatricians to refine the recommendations for paediatric treatment guidelines and regimens.

MARKET ACCESS AND PRODUCT INTRODUCTION, ICAP

Country-level activities

- Disseminate findings from the South Africa needs assessment with Workstream 3 partners. Continue planning for the Mozambique needs assessment and initiate plans for one in Kenya.
- Hold discussions with USG partners and NASCOP to plan for OPTIMIZE in Kenya, and with the MOH in Mozambique to identify opportunities for OPTIMIZE.
- Arrange and hold follow-up conversations with the ICAP country directors in Zimbabwe, DRC and Cote d'Ivoire. Introduce the project to ICAP's Swaziland team.

Documents and Tools Development

- Format the final version of the Impact Overview and an accompanying PowerPoint presentation with a graphic designer.

- Continue development of case studies and the online impact calculator.
- Finalise the market shaping strategy document and share it with partners for feedback and to initiate a workplan going forward.

Collaborations

- Continue regular conversations with CHAI regarding the coordination of product introduction activities in Kenya.
- Coordinate with CII to consider a questionnaire or focus group discussion around procurement and packaging at the 2017 supplier/buyer summit

Early Adopter/Pilot Assessments

- Attend additional calls with WHO, CHAI and UNITAID to coordinate activities around the introduction of enhanced monitoring tools.

NANOTECHNOLOGY, University of Liverpool

- Processing of tissues and plasma samples from the *in vivo* study investigating two formulations of darunavir/ritonavir at different ratios.
- Set-up of continuous cell lines in preparation for *in vitro* atazanavir formulation testing.

STAFFING CHANGES

- Vusi Sibeko, the Wits RHI Programme Manager seconded to the TAC, started on 3 January 2017.
- ICAP is hiring a Product Introduction Coordinator. The link to the job description is [here](#).

OUTPUTS

List any articles, manuscripts submitted for review; abstracts submitted; presentations given. (Also provide electronic version of such products for the Dropbox – see <https://www.dropbox.com/home/OPTIMIZE%20TechnicalSteeringCommittee/Calendar+Events>)

- 14 December 2016: Francois Venter presented to PEPFAR meeting in Pretoria: “Future Priorities (and Some Policy Problems”, Pretoria
- 28 December 2016: South African Medical Journal: Cutting the cost of South African antiretroviral therapy using newer, safer drugs (<http://www.samj.org.za/index.php/samj/article/view/11770>)

MEDIA COVERAGE

- 28 December 2016: Times Live: Better, safer, cheaper: the new HIV treatment about to undergo full-scale tests in SA (<http://www.timeslive.co.za/local/2016/12/28/Better%E2%80%9A-safer%E2%80%9A-cheaper-the-new-HIV-treatment-about-to-undergo-full-scale-tests-in-SA>)
- 29 December 2016: 702: SA could soon have safer and cheaper HIV treatment (<http://www.702.co.za/articles/237522/sa-could-soon-have-safer-and-cheaper-hiv-treatment>)
- 28 December 2016: PowerFM interview with Francois Venter about the SAMJ article. No link

available

- 29 December 2016: eNCA interview with Francois Venter about the SAMJ article. No link available

In the previous monthly update we included the presentation by Francois Venter at the Wits University 14th Prestigious Lecture. The theme of the presentation (ART: Do or Die), included an update on ART optimisation. Present at the lecture were the Gauteng MEC for Health, and the Dean of the Wits University School of Health Sciences.

