

New partnership works towards new therapeutic solutions for malaria

Malaria afflicts over 200-million people in the developing world each year, and takes an estimated 445,000 lives, mostly young children and pregnant women.



Professor Kelly Chibale of UCT's Drug Discovery and Development Unit (HBD)

Now, a collaboration between the Merck Global Health Institute, the University of Cape Town (UCT) and Medicines for Malaria Venture (MMV), co-funded by MMV and Merck will work towards finding new therapeutic solutions against mosquito-borne disease. The five-year project also includes a capacity building component to train African scientists in state-of-the-art research techniques to actively contribute to an international public-private research project.

In addition, Merck has provided access to 96,000 compounds from its corporate chemical library for screening against various stages of the plasmodium parasite lifecycle and is providing in-kind drug discovery support and advice. "Aiming to achieve the goal of delivering new health solutions for local populations, this collaborative approach between an academic group, an industry organisation, and a non-profit entity is essential to the Merck Global Health Institute's operating model," said Dr Beatrice Greco, head of research and development and access at the Merck Global Health Institute.

Capacity building

MMV, a non-profit organisation, is providing funding, expert knowledge and in-kind support to the project. "MMV has a long tradition of partnering with the pharmaceutical industry to identify new starting points for the development of new medicines to drive the eradication of malaria," said Dr Timothy Wells, MMV's chief scientific officer. "Merck's expertise and long history of bringing new medicines to target important patient needs makes this a particularly exciting collaboration."

Laboratory work and training will be conducted at the UCT's H3D, Africa's first integrated world-class drug discovery and development centre. "Besides contributing to the development of new therapeutic options to treat malaria patients, we are excited to provide opportunities for young African scientists to take part in the science and to improve their knowledge in drug discovery. Local capacity building is essential for the future of Africa-based research," said Professor Kelly Chibale, founder and director of H3D.

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