

April 20, 2008

The Uganda Health Communication Alliance is open for business!

Mark your calendars

Are We Ready to Cover the Next Epidemic?

On April 30, UHCA and the Makerere University Department of Mass Communication will cohost a workshop exploring the role of the press during epidemics. There is plenty to talk about. In the last two years, Uganda had outbreaks of Marburg, Ebola and Hepatitis E. Two new strains of Meningococcal Meningitis also appeared. And increasing travel, environmental encroachment and continued changes in food production methods and our ways of living make more epidemics likely.

The workshop will examine the causes of recent epidemics, take a critical look at how well the press has lived up to its responsibilities during such outbreaks, and discuss how we all can do a better job next time. Speakers will include **Dr. Sam Okware**, Commissioner of Health Services (Community Health) in the Ministry of Health; **Mr. Paul Kagwa**, Assistant Commissioner Health Services, Health Promotion and Education for the Ministry of Health; **Dr. William Mbabazi**, Disease Surveillance Officer for the World Health Organization; and **Dr. Charles Wendo**, editor of *Saturday Vision* (and one of the founders of UHCA).

Let us introduce ourselves

Who? We are a group of journalists and communication professionals from non-government organisations, government and academia.

What? Our main objectives are to train, empower and support journalists and public information specialists who report on health.

When? We were established as a legally-registered Ugandan organisation in 2007, and we aim to become a permanent, self-sustaining force in Ugandan society.

Where? We are based in Kampala, but we welcome the participation of journalists and professional communicators throughout Uganda – and from beyond. Contact us at ugandahealthcom@yahoo.com.

Why? To be effective, journalists and health communicators need technical and professional support.

How? We envision: this periodic newsletter, establishment of a Health Information Resource Centre for journalists, a website, training workshops, a monthly public discourse, and publication of guidebooks and other materials.

The details: April 30 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Makerere University Department of Gender and Women's Studies (Pool Road, opposite the swimming pool), First Floor conference room. We hope to see you there!

If you're coming, please notify us by Friday, April 25: ugandahealthcom@yahoo.com

World Malaria Day will be observed on April 25 with ceremonies in Ibanda District in western Uganda. It is impossible to play down the significance of the continuing effort to draw attention to this scourge. As the *Daily Monitor* reported last September, malaria remains Uganda's biggest killer disease, taking 320 lives each day. Aside from the heavy human toll, malaria represents an enormous burden for the health system; 60 million cases annually account for up to 14% of all in-patient deaths and 40% of all outpatient visits to health centers.

Coming soon! When you use the Internet to research a new disease or the latest news about clinical trials, do you rely on *Google* and *Wikipedia*? Be warned: They can be unreliable! Fortunately, there is a better way. In May, **Julia Royall**, chief of the Office of International Programs for the U.S. *National Library of Medicine*, will lead a hands-on workshop on how to find good, reliable information about health – and expert sources too – on the Internet. Ms. Royall, whose ties to Uganda date back to a time she was involved in efforts to establish the first Internet connection in this country, will offer the training at the Albert Cook library at the Makerere University Medical School. We'll let you know the details as soon as they are confirmed.

Noteworthy

Visiting fellow: In mid-January, **Christopher Conte** began a year-long stint in Uganda as a Knight International Health Journalism fellow. The long-time American journalist is here to work with journalists and media organizations to strengthen coverage of health issues. Conte, who was named by the *International Center for Journalists*, is the first of five health-journalism fellows who will be working in various countries in east and south Africa. He is based at *New Vision*, but is available to work with health journalists at any media organization anywhere in Uganda. Please feel free to contact him for individual or group consultation at cconte@newvision.co.ug.

Winners: **Alice Emasu** and **Irene Nabusoba** of *New Vision* took top prize in the 5th African Population Conference Competition for Journalists for their Jan. 23 story, "Cheap, Easy Drug to Save Mothers from Bleeding to Death." <http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/9/34/608258/Alice%20Emasu> The story described a simple, but under-recognized method for treating and preventing maternal hemorrhaging. **Shifa Mwesigye** of the *Weekly Observer* won special mention in the same conference for her story, "Contraceptives could help Uganda on MDGs," which ran on Jan. 3. (<http://www.ugandaobserver.com/new/archives/2008arch/easy/health/jan/hth200801032.php>).

Tuberculosis and Human Rights

The spread of drug-resistant tuberculosis has created a huge ethical problem for health authorities. To control spread of the disease, it is important to isolate people who have it, but can authorities forcibly institutionalise people who have committed no crime and don't agree to being isolated?

The *New York Times* recently described how the issue is playing out in South Africa. Jose Pearson TB hospital in Port Elizabeth is encircled by three fences topped with coils of razor wire, yet dozens of prisoners "cut holes in the fences, slipped through electrified wires or pushed through the gates in a desperate bid to spend the holidays with their families" at Christmas and Easter, the *Times* reported. "Patients have been tracked down and forced to return; the hospital has quadrupled the number of guards. Many patients fear they will get out of here only in a coffin." ("*Patients Chafe Under Lockdown in South Africa*," March 25, 2008).

Anti-HIV Efforts Are Deemed Inadequate:

Shortcomings in research – including inadequate pre-trial research and sample size, poor site preparation and lack of community engagement – are thwarting the search for new methods of HIV prevention, according to an article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (<http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/full/358/15/1543>). In the 15-20 years it may take to achieve an effective HIV vaccine, as many as 60 million new HIV infections may occur, according to the authors.

More African Health Research:

The Wellcome Trust announced April 11 that it will give almost US\$40 million to train scientists in sub-Saharan Africa. The U.K.-based charity noted that the region has 11 percent of the world's population and 25% of the global disease burden, but accounts for only one percent of the resources being spent on health and research.

Would you like to help?

Do you know about important health-related coming events, training opportunities, or job openings? Have you seen noteworthy reports, articles or websites that you think other health communicators should know about? Are there issues that you think a professional health-communication association should address? Don't keep it to yourself! Send tips, news items, announcements and suggestions to UHCA so we can post them. We're at ugandahealthcom@yahoo.com, and we would love to hear from you!

If you know somebody else who should receive this newsletter, Please pass his or her name along to us.

**Here's to your health –
and to the health of all Ugandans!**