December 2021

Together in the fight against cancer

Dear AAI Partners and Friends,

As we complete this year’s breast, testicular, and prostate cancer awareness months, our thoughts turn to the importance of patient advocacy in the fight against cancer in Africa. Patient education, outreach, and support is critical to early detection and better cancer outcomes. It is fitting, then, that we have joined with our newest partner, Project PINK BLUE, who advocate for cancer patients along each step of the treatment pathway.

We, too, are committed to strengthening Africa’s response to cancer. Through the African Access Initiative (AAI), we continue our efforts to build clinical and research capacity prioritized by our partners. Recently, we have supported Rwanda’s creation of online cancer education modules for primary healthcare workers, organized virtual courses for Francophone radiation therapy technicians, and taught early-career clinicians about clinical trials. BVGH also helped the NSIA-LUTH Cancer Center to commission its 3D HDR brachytherapy services.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to our nine new AC³T member sites whose clinical trial experience and infrastructure are profiled via our AC³T Online Platform.

Please share this newsletter with any of your colleagues who are interested in supporting AAI. We welcome any ideas or suggestions for improving cancer outcomes in Africa.

On behalf of the BVGH team, thank you to healthcare workers for your endurance and courage during these challenging times.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Dent, President & CEO
BIO Ventures for Global Health

Partnership Announcement

Project PINK BLUE
BVGH welcomes its newest partner, Project PINK BLUE, to AAI. Project PINK BLUE is a non-profit cancer organization working across Nigeria to improve cancer care and patient outcomes by educating the public about cancer and the benefits of regular screenings, providing treatment navigation support to cancer patients, and promoting cancer research. With the aim to reduce late-stage cancer diagnoses in Nigeria, Project PINK BLUE focuses their education and awareness efforts on hard-to-reach areas in rural Nigeria.

Establishing sustainable access to cancer medicines and technologies

Affordable and Sustainable Cancer Drug Access in Côte d’Ivoire

Cancer patients at the Centre National d’Oncologie Médicale et de Radiothérapie Alassane Ouattara (CNRAO), Côte d’Ivoire’s only national radiotherapy center, now have access to affordable, high-quality, life-saving medicines through BVGH’s AAI cancer drug access program. BVGH coordinated CNRAO’s procurement of over 3,000 packs of eight US Food and Drug Administration-approved cancer medicines, including managing product selection, arranging shipping terms, and ensuring that the necessary importation documents were secured.

CNRAO has the capacity to treat 160 to 200 cancer patients daily.

Building clinical oncology capacity

Intensity-Modulated Radiation Therapy (IMRT) Virtual Training for Francophone Radiation Therapy Technicians (RTTs)
Earlier this year, BVGH and Rayos Contra Cancer (RCC) launched a virtual IMRT training program for Francophone RTTs. This radiotherapy training program built on and followed an IMRT course conducted by RCC and BVGH in 2020 for medical physicists and radiation oncologists. The 17-week RTT course covers basic and advanced radiotherapy principles, as well as the techniques needed to safely administer radiotherapy to patients. More than 60 RTTs from Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Gabon, Mauritania, and Senegal are being trained by experts from Belgium, France, and Morocco.

**IMRT for Anglophone RTTs**

It’s a wrap! BVGH congratulates the 66 RTTs who recently completed the virtual IMRT training program offered by BVGH and RCC to Anglophone technicians.

**NSIA-LUTH Cancer Center (NLCC) Launches 3D HDR Brachytherapy Services**
At the request of NLCC in Lagos, Nigeria, BVGH coordinated virtual and hands-on training programs to support the hospital's commissioning of its new 3D high-dose rate brachytherapy system. Experts based at Kaiser Permanente, the University of California, San Diego, and Cavalry Master Newcastle in Australia advised NLCC staff on their commissioning preparations and practice refinement. BVGH coordinated the procurement and delivery of Gafchromic film – a critical quality assurance tool. Two experts from Varian and Ahmad Bin Zayed Al Nahyan Center for Cancer Treatment gave hands-on instruction as NLCC’s radiation oncologists, medical physicists, and radiation therapy technicians launched the hospital’s gynecologic brachytherapy services. More than five patients were treated in the first month.

“3D HDR brachytherapy is instrumental to the treatment of some of the most prevalent cancers in Nigeria. With BVGH’s help in sourcing experts from around the world in guiding our staff in commissioning the service, we can now be counted among the centres that offer the cutting service around the world.” –Dr. Tolulope Adewole, CEO, NLCC

MSD Fellows Collaborate with BVGH to Improve Cancer Education for Caregivers

In response to Rwanda’s goal of improving its healthcare workers’ approach to cancer, BVGH organized and led a fellowship program between Rwanda’s Ministry of Health, the Rwandan Biomedical Centre (RBC), and MSD* fellows working for BVGH through the Richard T. Clark Fellowship for Global Health program.

The three fellows worked with BVGH and the RBC Cancer Diseases Unit to improve Rwandan primary care providers’ access to RBC’s cancer education materials. Over three months, BVGH worked with the fellows and RBC to digitize RBC’s training materials and develop new e-learning modules for nurses and community health workers. In alignment with AAI and RBC’s focus on cancer, the modules included training materials focused on Rwanda’s most prevalent cancers (breast, cervical, prostate, pediatric, and
The Rwandan team – led by Jean Bosco Ndayambaje, Vedaste Hategakimana, Emmanuel Ntawuyirusha, and Emile Munyembarama – performed a technical review of the content and its customization onto Rwanda’s national e-learning platform. An estimated 10,000 Rwandan nurses will receive training via this new electronic platform.

*MSD is a trademark of Merck & Co., Inc., Kenilworth, NJ, United States of America

**Addressing the cancer data gap in Africa through clinical trials**

**Clinical Trial Course for Early-Career Researchers**

BVGH, the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO), and the University Hospital Center (CHU), Treichville held a six-week virtual course on conducting clinical research in resource constrained settings. Forty early-career oncologists from Côte d’Ivoire, Senegal, Cameroon, and Rwanda learned the critical skills needed to advance their own research, made new connections with other researchers, and learned about current research projects underway and led by African colleagues. Session recordings can be found [here](#).

“We need to know how to manage clinical research activities in Africa to combat the lack of information about cancer among African populations. This course provided us with the fundamentals to do so.”

--Prof. Innocent Adoubi, Director of Le Programme National de Lutte Contre le Cancer (PNLCA) and Head of the Oncology Department of the University Hospital Center Treichville in Côte d’Ivoire

**Cross-sector Collaborations to Further Cancer Research Capacity in Côte d’Ivoire**

Congratulations to Dr. N’da Marcelin Homian, a medical oncologist at AAI partner hospital, CHU Treichville in Côte d’Ivoire, who was invited to present his cancer research at the AORTIC 2021 Virtual Conference. Dr. Homian presented his case-controlled study focusing on the role of natural killer cells in cancer subtype, stage, and treatment of breast cancer in Côte d’Ivoire. This study was performed through an AAI collaboration established between Dr. Homian and Dr. Darya Kizub, an oncologist at MD Anderson Cancer Center.
**AC³T Study Pool Mini-Grant Awardees Selected**

Following the 14-week [AC³T virtual clinical trial training program](#), BVGH launched an application for funding to conduct small clinical research studies. The AC³T Study Pool, which was seeded with funding from Takeda, will be used to award eight applicants with $2,000 to conduct pilot research projects. Stay tuned to the next AAI newsletter, which will feature the awardees selected by the AC³T Steering Committee.

> “The AC³T Study Pool Mini-Grants is providing the virtual clinical trial training program attendees with the opportunity to practice their research skills while simultaneously collecting data that can be used to inform clinical decision making. We are proud to support this project that will raise awareness of Africa’s clinical trial capabilities and priorities.” --Dr. Chris Reddick, Vice President, Head of R&D Health Equity, Takeda

**BVGH Welcomes Nine New AC³T Members**

[BVGH’s AC³T Online Platform](#) enables African hospitals and research sites to showcase their clinical trial expertise and experience. Nine institutions from seven countries recently joined AC³T and have been profiled on the Platform. Check out the 50+ clinical trial sites on the Platform and see the capabilities of our newly featured hospitals:

- Centre for Research in Therapeutic Sciences, Strathmore University, [Kenya](#)
- Centre National de Recherche et de Formation sur le Paludisme (CNRFP), [Burkina Faso](#)
- Hôpital De Référence de Maradi, [Niger](#)
- Lumumba Sub County Hospital, [Kenya](#)
- Mbeya Zonal Referral Hospital, [Tanzania](#)
- University of Benin Teaching Hospital, [Nigeria](#)
- University Cheikh Anta Diop, [Senegal](#)
- University Clinical Research Center, [Mali](#)
- University of Dodoma, [Tanzania](#)

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**Expanding awareness of cancer in Africa**

**Sebeccly Cancer Care**

Through their many innovative projects, [Sebeccly Cancer Care](#) is working to improve the survival rates of cancer patients in Nigeria. Several of their awareness campaigns have reached over 20,000,000 people, and their [Time to Screen](#) campaign benefited over 12,000 women. In our next newsletter, learn more about SOAR, the Sebeccly Oncopadi Act Foundation that accelerates access to cancer care in remote areas.

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**Announcements**
**Africa and Cancer**

The African Organization for Research and Training in Cancer (AORTIC) has partnered with Nature to launch the Africa and Cancer channel to support collaborative cancer research in Africa. Interested in submitting a contribution? Send your name, email address, institution, institution address, contribution title and 2-3 sentence summary, and 3-5 sentence biography to research@aortic-africa.org.

**Strategic Training Achievements for Research Success (STARS)**

Applications are open for a part-time program that seeks to promote high quality cancer research in Sub-Saharan Africa. Training will take place over nine months, with awards of up to $25,000. Letter of intent deadline is December 31, 2021. Learn more, including how to apply, [here](#).

**Funding Opportunity: Basic Research in Cancer Health Disparities**

Small research grants are available for investigators looking into cancer health disparities. These grants are designed to support simple, quick, and innovative studies. The next submission date is February 15, 2022. Learn more [here](#).

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**Join the Fight**

To learn more about AAI and to get involved, please contact Katy Graef.

**Thank you to our AAI Partners**
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