Dear AAI Partners and Friends,

We celebrate the beginning of each year with Cervical Cancer Awareness Month. Cervical cancer is on the rise in Africa and is the leading cause of cancer death in women. In 2020, experts estimated that there were more than 604,000 new cases of cervical cancer worldwide, with nearly 90% of these cases occurring in low- and middle-income countries. BVGH promotes both awareness and access to treatments in Africa including through our Rwandan Educate, Screen, and Treat program and its focus on bringing cervical cancer services to the community. Easy access to educational resources, screening, and treatment are critical to reduce the impact of this deadly disease.

Beyond cancer awareness among the public, healthcare practitioners must also be equipped with the know-how and proper skills to provide high-quality cancer care. BVGH has continued to organize and conduct training activities during the pandemic; our 2021 programs attracted over 3,000 registrants. We concluded the year with two digital courses for nurses and pharmacists, a hands-on fellowship on radio-iodine treatment for thyroid cancer, and a collaboration to enable access to diagnostics in Southern Rwanda.

With Takeda’s support, we launched the AC³T Study Pool Mini-Grant program, awarding eight applicants with funding to support their cancer research projects. The results of their studies will inform healthcare management and improve treatment outcomes.

We welcome our new AAI partner, the Cormode Cancer Foundation of Nigeria. Their dedication to sharing the personal struggles and triumphs of cancer patients and their caregivers is helping to demystify the disease and provide hope to those diagnosed with cancer.

It is with a continued commitment to patient advocacy and to our hospital partners that we ask you to 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.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Dent, President & CEO
BIO Ventures for Global Health
Celebrating our Partners on World Cancer Day

BVGH and its AAI hospital partners commemorated World Cancer Day 2021 through social media, a cancer walk to raise the public’s awareness of cancer, television and radio announcements, and more. #closethecaregap

During this one month campaign, @RBCRwanda with its partners will focus on increasing awareness of the population on cancer prevention and control, improve equity and access to quality cancer care, provision of cervical cancer screening and breast cancer early detection services.
BVGH welcomes its new partner, Cormode Cancer Foundation, to AAI. Founded by a cancer survivor, Cormode Cancer Foundation is dedicated to cancer support, awareness, and education in Nigeria. With a focus on mental as well as physical health, their outreach includes a twice-monthly television program. Their online programming, Let’s Talk About It, offers support through discussions, presentations, and Q&A sessions that highlight challenges faced by cancer sufferers. We look forward to learning from them and working together to improve cancer patients’ experiences.
Cameroon Oncology Center Receives Its First AAI Order of Cancer Drugs

The Cameroon Oncology Center in Douala, Cameroon received its first order of affordable, high-quality medicine through BVGH’s AAI cancer drug access program. BVGH coordinated the center’s procurement of two US Food and Drug Administration-approved cancer medicines directly from the drug manufacturer.

Patient-Centered Cancer Care in Nigeria and Côte d’Ivoire

Better informed patients lead to better health outcomes, and with BVGH’s support, hospitals in Nigeria and Côte d’Ivoire are reaching their goals of providing patient-focused care. In late 2021, BVGH organized and led a patient-centered care program between the NSIA-LUTH Cancer Center (NLCC), Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital (ABUTH), CHU Treichville, and four MSD* fellows working for BVGH through the Richard T. Clark Fellowship Program.

Leveraging focus group discussions and surveys of local patients and providers, the team revealed key challenges and care gaps faced by each hospital. These data informed the creation of letstalkaboutcancer.com, an online resource featuring cancer awareness brochures, cancer patient information booklets, and interactive, self-guided e-learning modules for providers to strengthen their communications with patients.

BVGH and the MSD fellows conducted virtual meetings with partner hospitals to develop plans for integrating letstalkaboutcancer.com materials into daily practices. The roll out of practitioner e-learning modules is ongoing, and discussions are underway in Côte d’Ivoire to include the materials in national breast and cervical cancer awareness programs.

Working closely with country partners, regional translators, and radio stations, the team produced cancer awareness jingles in fifteen languages that have been aired on Nigerian radio stations across the country. It’s estimated these catchy messages have reached 100 million people. To hear the English version click here.

* MSD is a trademark of Merck & Co., Inc., Kenilworth, NJ, United States of America
Improving Thyroid Cancer Care in Northern Nigeria

The Usman Danfodiyo University Teaching Hospital (UDUTH) in Sokoto, Nigeria established its Nuclear Medicine Unit in 2020, thereby expanding the treatment services available locally to cancer patients in Northern Nigeria. Dr. Garba Haruna Yunusa, a consultant radiologist at UDUTH, enlisted BVGH’s support to secure a Union for International Cancer Control Technical Fellowship. During his four-week fellowship at Stellenbosch University and Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town, South Africa, Dr. Yunusa gained transferrable skills in radioactive iodine therapy for differentiated thyroid cancer. These new skills will enable Dr. Yunusa and his colleagues to commission the Nuclear Medicine Unit and establish UDUTH as a leading thyroid cancer treatment center in Nigeria.

AAI Partners are Making it Easier for Rwandans to Access Cancer Diagnostic Services

Rwandans living in the country’s Southern Province travel three hours to Kigali or five hours to Butaro for special tests in cancer diagnostic services. Due to the distance and associated costs, many patients delay the trip or are unable to make it altogether. Dr. Elisée Hategekimana, Head of the Anatomic Pathology Service at the University Teaching Hospital of Butaré (CHUB) and his team completed an AAI Hospital Needs Assessment defining the pathology lab’s challenges in providing diagnostic services to the population it served. BVGH, and its partner the American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP), went to work to support CHUB to fill gaps and build staff experience through training, which included a four-week fellowship with CHUB for Dr. Kelsey Hummel, the ASCP Fellow from the Baylor College of Medicine (BCM). The fellowship experience and collaboration expanded to secure grant funding to establish a mobile cytology clinic that will bring cancer diagnostic services to communities across the Southern Province. In addition, with the support of BCM and an AC3T Study Pool grant, CHUB is preparing to offer manual immunohistochemistry (IHC) services at the hospital.

“These partnerships have been a tremendous support in helping CHUB establish advanced cancer diagnostic services for the communities we serve. Today, our technicians and pathologists are successfully evaluating HER2neu in gastric cancer cases and planning to evaluate for MMR genes in colorectal cancer samples. We are committed to continuing on this journey to provide state of the art cancer care for patients in our community.”

– Dr. Elisée Hategekimana

Digital Oncology Pharmacy Training

BVGH and instructors from Lecture 3: Continuum of Care in Cancer Management
BVGH partnered with Project PINK BLUE* to organize a four-part digital lecture series on oncology pharmacy. The special series was held to establish baseline knowledge for oncology pharmacy practitioners participating in Project PINK BLUE’s Upgrade Oncology hands-on pharmacy training. The digital lecture topics, which were selected by the Upgrade Oncology Steering Committee, were presented by experts from Nigeria, the US, and the UK. More than 90 pharmacists from Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria, and Rwanda attended the digital presentations.

**Digital Oncology Nursing Special Lecture Series**

In response to requests from attendees of BVGH’s digital oncology nursing course, BVGH and Project PINK BLUE* organized a three-part digital lecture series covering psycho-oncology, oncology emergencies, and pain management. Each lecture was co-developed and co-led by trainers from leading Nigerian hospitals and Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in the US. More than 350 nurses from 15 African countries attended the special series.

“I really enjoyed being a part of this project. I was able to share my expertise and learn from my colleagues. I believe courses like this lecture series will help oncology nurses in Africa better care for their patients.”

– Michelle Mangongolo, Nursing Services Manager at NSIA-LUTH Cancer Center, Lecture 2 instructor and course attendee

*These programs were supported by Project PINK BLUE funders: ACT Foundation, US Mission in Nigeria, and ROCHE Products Limited.
2021 AC³T Mini-Grant Awardees

Congratulations AC³T Study Pool Mini-Grant awardees! With partnership and support from Takeda, eight early-career African healthcare professionals were awarded $2,000 to conduct pilot cancer research projects. Building on BVGH’s 14-week digital clinical trial training program, the grants are intended to enable awardees’ use of the research skills gained during the training program and to produce data that can be used to apply for larger, externally funded grants.

Dr. Jamilu Faruk Abdullahi, Pediatric Oncologist, Nigeria
Dr. Adewumi Alabi, Clinical and Radiation Oncologist, Nigeria
Dr. Adu Appiah-Kubi, Gynecology Oncologist, Ghana
Dr. Faraja Chiwanga, Endocrinologist, Tanzania
Dr. Nazima Dharsee, Consultant Oncologist, Tanzania
Dr. Sharon Mweni, Director of Medical Services, Kenya
Mrs. Faith Mutisya, Asst. Director of Nursing, Kenya
Dr. Annet Nakaganda (PhD), Oncology Epidemiologist, Uganda

The AC³T Study Pool Mini-Grant awardees are investigating various avenues of improving the quality of cancer patient care. The eight awardees span five African countries and seven institutions. BVGH has paired each awardee with an experienced cancer researcher from a top international cancer institution to act as mentors and research thought partners. Let’s meet two of our awardees:

Dr. Sharon Mweni, Head Medical Officer of Oncology and Director of Medical Services and Research, and Mrs. Faith Mutisya, Assistant Director of Nursing Services, both at Machakos Cancer Centre (MCC) in Kenya are co-principal investigators studying the characteristics of patients presenting with breast cancer at MCC. Their research will produce evidence-based data that will impact MCC’s use of targeted interventions to enhance early detection of breast cancer.

“The AC³T Study Pool Mini-Grant program is working towards supporting African researchers and closing the cancer data gap in Africa. I would like to offer our sincere congratulations to the awardees. We look forward to seeing what they accomplish.”

– Judith Kinley, Senior Director, R&D Health Equity, Takeda Pharmaceutical
Increasing Cervical Cancer Awareness in Rwanda

At the request of the Rwandan Ministry of Health, BVGH partnered with the Rwanda Biomedical Center (RBC) to develop and implement a cervical cancer Educate, Screen, and Treat (EST) program to increase awareness of cervical cancer and roll out screening services at the district level. Prior to the launch of screening services, BVGH, RBC, and key implementation partner, GardaWorld, implemented a radio and print campaign to raise awareness of cervical cancer and how to seek care. The campaign resulted in more than 6,000 women being screened for cervical cancer at their local health centers. After their appointment, each woman was provided with more information about how to prevent and detect the deadly cancer.

BVGH and RBC’s EST program resulted in cervical cancer services being offered to patients in Bugesera District for the first time ever. Watch for our next AAI newsletter, which will describe how the EST program increased clinical capacity to achieve sustainable cervical cancer care in the district.

“I was surprised to find out that cervical cancer is preventable. It is something that scares every woman, you see how people suffer, so you get worried.”
– EST program participant

“You can be treated if sick and if not you can know your stats. . . I now have peace of mind.”
– EST program participant
Cormode Cancer Foundation partners with African Independent Television (AIT) for a twice-monthly program that offers support for cancer patients and general cancer education. The program airs every second and fourth Wednesday at 8:15am WAT. View their library of shows here. Upcoming topics:

- February 23: Closing the Care Gap in Nigeria
- March 9: Colorectal Cancer
- March 23: Understanding Treatment Options and How They Affect Patients

Upcoming BVGH Digital Trainings

The first of our upcoming courses for this year are below, with more to come. Watch for details in future newsletters.

- Pediatric Cancers & Hematologic Malignancies – February - March
- Pain management seminar – February 26 and 28 – register here.
- ASCO-Multidisciplinary Breast Cancer Training (Rwanda) – March 18 - 20
- Advanced Pathology of Solid Tumors – April/May
- Advanced Diagnostic Techniques and Diagnosis of Blood Disorders – June/July

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.

Funding Opportunity: NIH Supporting Collaborative Research to Benefit LMIC Institutions

This award program pairs researchers in the US with those in low- and middle-income (LMIC) countries with the goal of creating effective treatments that are relevant to the needs of the LMIC country. Applications are due July 13, 2022. Learn more here.

Join the Fight

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

Thank you to our AAI Partners