

NIH Global Health Interest Group, Postdoc Lecture Series

September 11, 2012

Seminar Title: Health Research in the WHO African Region – “Notes from the Field”

Presenter: Peter Ndumbe RPL/AFRO

In his current position in the African regional office of WHO Dr. Ndumbe seeks to increase health equity in Africa through the promotion of health-related research and the sharing of research results and experience by researchers in the African region. Within the WHO constitution “Research” appears 3 times and a new WHO Strategy for Research was adopted at the World Health Assembly in May 2010. Dr. Ndumbe talked about the overarching strategy of the WHO on research for health. There are five interrelated goals all contingent upon the first which is implementation of organizational changes to help strengthen the research culture. This will facilitate implementation of the other four goals which include prioritizing research to addresses immediate health needs, increasing capacity to support the development of a robust health research system, setting standards and norms to promote good practice in research, and finally to strengthen the translational links between research policy and practice. Achieving a functional National Health Research System will require stewardship of the policies and plans, sustainable resources for universities and research organizations, continued production of research products such as publications and translational products and finally continued financial support. To augment these goals and practices, Dr. Ndumbe mentioned The Algiers Declaration which commits to allocating at least “2% of national health expenditure and at least of 5% of external aid for health projects and programs to research and research capacity building and invest more in research aimed at improving health systems...”

One problem area that Dr. Ndumbe would like to address is the lack of research collaboration in Africa. An example is HIV/AIDS research where, of all articles published in this area, only 5% are in collaboration between two or more African countries.

In summary, Dr. Ndumbe enumerated several objectives he hopes to achieve in the future: **1)** creation of a forum for researchers in the African region where they can share their experiences; **2)** enhance leadership, ownership and management of health-related research in the region; **3)** promote “inter-sectoral” collaborations as a way of approaching health issues and challenges in Africa; **4)** enhance “South-South” cooperation and collaborations in health research; and **5)** leverage the collective power of African institutions and organizations. Some of these goals can be achieved in the immediate future such as creation of an African Forum for health researchers to promote a more collaborative environment. Additional short-term goals of the WHO/AFRO include selecting a common set of research topics for all countries to help foster a more collaborative environment. Another goal is to encourage and support African countries to support the implementation of several signed declarations (e.g. Ouagadougou and Algiers Declarations) and to set up groups within the Ministry of Health