



Global Virus Network’s Annual Meeting Fortifies Bonds on the African Continent to Catalyze Innovative Research, Strengthen Pandemic Preparedness, and Combat Scientific Misinformation

Duke-NUS Medical School’s Dr. Linfa Wang Awarded GVN’s 2024 Robert C. Gallo Award for Scientific Excellence and Leadership

Durban, South Africa, September 18, 2024: The [Global Virus Network](#) concluded its annual meeting of closed [scientific sessions](#) held 16-18 September 2024 with a press conference. Co-hosted by the [Centre for the AIDS Programme of Research in South Africa \(CAPRISA\)](#), the meeting of world-leading experts discussed advancing and collaborating on cutting-edge science, the rising number of mpox outbreaks, the growing challenge of scientific misinformation during a global health crisis, and pandemic preparedness strategies for strengthening health systems, enhancing forecasting models, and providing greater access to vaccines and treatments.

Dr. Sten Vermund, GVN President and Professor of the Yale School of Public Health, USA, said, “We are grateful to our CAPRISA colleagues for cohosting a substantive and impactful scientific meeting with so many African scientists participating. The virology research presented at this year’s annual meeting was of the highest caliber. The GVN is fortunate to have Centers of Excellence and affiliated laboratories on this dynamic continent.”

Presenting about strategies to train the next generation of virologists and prepare for future global health security challenges, **Dr. Alash’le Abimiku**, Executive Director of the International Research Center of Excellence of the Institute of Human Virology, Nigeria, a GVN Center of Excellence, reviewed topics on innovative educational approaches, mentorship, capacity-building in low- and middle-income countries, and fostering diversity in virological, medical, and public health fields. She said, “Global threats through outbreaks and pandemics require global response through cooperation and partnerships. One such partnership is championed by the GVN where virologists and scientists work together to provide important insights into viruses of pandemic potential as exemplified by the current GVN annual scientific meeting taking place in Durban with full participation of African virologists and scientists.”

Dr. Kazunobu Kojima, Technical Lead for Biosafety and Biosecurity, World Health Organization in Geneva participated in the panel discussion “Perspectives from the Agencies.” He said “I personally appreciated this GVN meeting’s participant diversity in terms of geographical representation and expertise. Genuine enthusiasm and certain commitment to contribute to public health seemed to cement the community and characterize its identity.”

Dr. Nokukhanya Msomi, Head of Virology in the School of Laboratory Medicine and Medical Sciences at University of KwaZulu-Natal and National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS), South Africa, a GVN Center of Excellence, participated in discussions about viral diagnostics and therapeutics and exploring

innovative tools for detecting and treating infections. Dr. Msomi said, “The GVN creates a vehicle and platform to share knowledge lessons and experiences that help us build resilient systems as well as responses to viral infections of public health significance.”

Dr. Rubeshan Perumal, Senior Researcher at CAPRISA and co-Leader of the GVN Long COVID Action Committee, led discussions on acute and long-term impacts of viral infections, post-viral syndromes such as Long COVID, chronic disease development, and implications for global health systems. Dr. Perumal emphasized, “By bringing its Annual Scientific Meeting to Africa, GVN has emphasized the African continent's centrality to solving present and future viral threats to humanity. The meeting has showcased the intensity of our solidarity as a global community of scientists committed to the discovery, evaluation, and equitable implementation of interventions that protect human lives from deadly viruses, especially those of pandemic potential.”

In focused discussions on global preparedness, experts discussed "Disease X," the next unknown pathogen, and shared insights on how to prepare for unpredictable viral threats, including policies on international coordination, rapid response systems, and insights from recent pandemics to prevent future outbreaks. **Dr. Rachel Roper**, Professor of Microbiology and Immunology at East Carolina University, USA, and co-chair of GVN's Mpox Action Committee, said “The GVN meeting was fantastic. It was so great to have time with the African scientists, especially at this time when we have a public health emergency of international concern due to mpox.”

Co-leading a session on pandemic preparedness, **Dr. Nadia Sam-Agudu**, Senior Technical Advisor of Pediatric and Adolescent HIV at the Institute of Human Virology, Nigeria, and Professor of Pediatrics in the Division of Pediatric Infectious Diseases at the University of Minnesota Medical School, USA, explored lessons learned from SARS-CoV-2 and other outbreaks. Dr. Sam-Agudu said, “Implementation science is critical to the use of evidence generated for disease control and prevention.”

Professor Salim Abdool Karim, Director of the GVN Center of Excellence at CAPRISA, co-led a discussion on the growing challenge of misinformation in science, especially during global health crises. Professor Abdool Karim and colleagues examined the impact of misinformation on public trust, pandemic response, and vaccine awareness and offered effective strategies for identifying, debunking, and countering false information while promoting accurate, evidence-based communication in an increasingly digital world. Professor Abdool Karim said, “Climate change and human encroachment into the habitats of animals are creating many new opportunities for animal viruses to infect humans, creating the possibility of new pandemics. The world’s first line of defense to prevent the next pandemic requires a network of virology laboratories across the world undertaking surveillance to identify new viral threats early – this is exactly what all of us at GVN have set out to do.”

During the meeting, GVN honored several prominent individuals:

- [GVN's 2024 Robert C. Gallo Award for Scientific Excellence and Leadership](#) was presented in recognition of exceptional leadership and innovation in virology research to **Professor Linfa Wang**, Executive Director of the Programme for Research in Epidemic Preparedness and Response (PREPARE), Singapore and Professor in the Selected Programme in Emerging Infectious Diseases, Duke-NUS, Singapore, a GVN Center of Excellence. “It’s a great honor for me to receive this prestigious award from GVN,” Professor Wang said. “To me, GVN is like a big family of like-minded scientists. This award has three keywords ‘Gallo, Scientific Excellence, and Leadership’,

all of them mean a lot to me. I tell my trainees that doing good research is important, but not sufficient. We all need to train ourselves to be ready and prepared to make a public good impact on society. I am proud of making such contributions as a member of the GVN family!”

- **Drs. Rachel Roper and Rubeshan Perumal** received **GVN 2024 Action Committee Awards** for their exceptional efforts and accomplishments by GVN Action Committee members in advancing collective goals.
- **GVN 2024 Early Career Investigator Awards**, highlighting emerging talent and significant early-career achievements in virology research within the GVN, were awarded to **Dr. David Martinez** of the Yale School of Medicine, USA and **Dr. Gage Moreno** of the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard, USA, a GVN Center of Excellence.
- **Professor Abdool Karim** was thanked with **GVN’s 2024 Cohost Award** for co-sponsoring the highly successful meeting in Durban.
- **Mr. Mathew Evins**, Treasurer & former Chair of the GVN Board of Directors and Chairman & CEO of Evins Communications, Ltd., USA was honored with **GVN’s 2024 Founders Award**, which celebrates individuals or organizations that have significantly contributed to the success of the organization and its initiatives in the spirit of the GVN’s three co-founders, Drs. Robert Gallo, William Hall, and the late Reinhard Kurth.

Dr. Vermund announced that the 2025 GVN Annual Meeting will be held in October 2025, at the University of South Florida, Tampa, FL, USA, GVN’s new global headquarters.

For the full three-day agenda of the 2024 GVN Annual Scientific Meeting in Durban, please visit <https://gvn.org/gvn-2024-durban/>. For a recording of the press conference, please visit <https://gvn.org/gvn-fortifying-bonds-on-the-african-continent/>.

About the Global Virus Network (GVN)

The GVN, headquartered at the University of South Florida, is essential and critical in the preparedness, defense, and first research response to emerging, existing, and unidentified viruses that pose a clear and present threat to public health. Working in close coordination with established national and international institutions, the GVN is a coalition comprised of eminent human and animal virologists from 80+ Centers of Excellence and Affiliates in 40+ countries, working collaboratively to train the next generation, advance knowledge about how to identify and diagnose pandemic viruses, mitigate and control how such viruses spread and make us sick, as well as develop drugs, vaccines, and treatments to combat them. No single institution in the world has expertise in all viral areas other than the GVN, which brings together the finest medical virologists to leverage their individual expertise and coalesce global teams of specialists on the scientific challenges, issues, and problems posed by pandemic viruses. The GVN is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. For more information, please visit www.gvn.org.

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