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UCT institute partners with health department to produce COVID-19 resources to equip low-income communities

The Knowledge Translation Unit (KTU) at the University of Cape Town's (UCT) Lung Institute is producing a range of COVID-19 resources to equip communities and healthcare workers living and working in under-resourced areas in the country with important information and ways to stop the spread of the virus.

The project is spearheaded by the KTU, in partnership with the Western Cape Department of Health and local non-profit organisations (NPOs).

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, KTU director, Professor Lara Fairall, said a plethora of resources were being developed on COVID-19 but weren't necessarily reaching low-income communities. "We can now see that people are hungry for information in print; for tangible material that they can read and then convey to family members. And it's often simple stuff like how to wear a mask and how best to clean a surface – things some take for granted."

The resources are provided in pamphlet, brochure and poster format and give community members the opportunity to move out of a state of fear and to protect themselves and their health. They are produced in four of South Africa's official languages – English, Afrikaans, isiXhosa and Sesotho.

Information includes how to stop the spread of the virus and the steps to follow for effective home-based care once a family member has tested positive for COVID-19. Resources are distributed via NPOs, community health workers and alongside humanitarian aid. "This is community education and it's taking people out of their comfort zones and empowering them to take ownership of their own health," Professor Fairall said.

She explained that resources will be useful to patients with chronic conditions whose access to healthcare facilities have been restricted as a result of the nationwide lockdown. "The response has been overwhelmingly positive. In recent weeks our content has also cropped up in other parts of the country through NPOs there. This has been so very humbling and gratifying."

In addition, two COVID-19 online training modules have also been developed and draw on the KTU's face-to-face training principles in an online setting by using case studies.

She said online training provides participants with a new innovative form of learning, and acts as an alternative means to access information. In order to replicate the clinic setting and the processes healthcare workers are familiar with, both modules have been designed with a person-centred approach in mind. "The training places a healthcare worker and a patient at the centre of a challenge and examines effective and efficient methods to navigate it."

She is proud that the resources have moved beyond South African borders to Nigeria and Ethiopia and have also made their way to Brazil where they are being localised to health services with the help of the KTU's partner organisations.

"Science depends on society's involvement in research in ways that often don't provide immediate benefits to participants, generating solutions that are only scaled up years later. It is at moments like these we need to let science be in service of society. This is what we need to get right," she concluded.

ENDS

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