

# UFS traditional medicine expert heads up WHO Regional Committee

Prof. Motlalepula Matsabisa, Associate Professor in the Department of Pharmacology at the University of the Free State (UFS), will lead Africa's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic with his appointment as chairperson of the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Regional Expert Advisory Committee on Traditional Medicines for COVID-19.

Prof. Matsabisa has been chosen over 25 other experts from 27 African countries to head this committee, tasked with setting up research and clinical trials for COVID-19 and beyond. The committee is also supported by the African Union (AU), the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC – Africa), and the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP).

The committee was established by the WHO and CDC – Africa on 22 July with the aim of providing independent scientific advice and support to countries on the safety, efficacy and quality of traditional medicine therapies. It is also an effort to enhance research and development of traditional medicines for COVID-19 in Africa.

"This is a huge continental and global responsibility being laid on my shoulders as a chairperson. I have to keep the committee together and ensure that it delivers on its set mandate and terms of reference. I need to ensure that the committee helps the continent and region to get the scientific and legislative aspects on traditional medicine development on track," says Prof. Matsabisa.

"I have taken this position and responsibility, knowing quite well what it entails. I want to do this for the continent and for the sake of good science of all traditional healers and consumers of traditional medicines on the continent and beyond."

According to Prof. Matsabisa, he is looking forward to working with a team of dedicated experts from 27 countries in the African region, and being of help to countries that need assistance with clinical trials, including preclinical work to move to clinical research. He is also looking forward to countries asking South Africa to be part of their multicentre studies in clinical trials for traditional medicines, and to



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help set up clinical trial teams that include Western-trained clinicians to get into traditional medicine studies.

Prof. Matsabisa says his new position took effect the same day as his appointment and will run as long as COVID-19 is part of our daily lives, and even beyond. It entails supporting member states to implement the WHO master plan for clinical trial protocols in order to generate credible data for COVID-19 results, based on traditional medicines. The committee will also coordinate support to member states in the African region to collaborate on clinical trials of traditional medicine-based therapies – elevating standards by pooling expertise in multicentre studies, as well as complying with GCP (good clinical practice) and GPP (good participatory practice) guidelines for trials of emerging and re-emerging pathogens.

"The committee will also advise on strengthening the capacity of national medicine regulatory authorities to accelerate the issuance of marketing authorisations for traditional medicine products that have been well researched for safety, efficacy and quality, as well as to expedite the approval of clinical trials on traditional medicines. This will help to meet the national registration criteria and the WHO norms and standards of quality, safety and efficacy for the management of COVID-19 and others."

"It will also provide independent scientific advice to the WHO and other partners regarding policies, strategies and plans for integrating traditional medicines into COVID-19 responses and health systems," explains Prof. Matsabisa.

*Written by André Damons, Senior Media Relations Officer: Communication and Marketing, UFS*

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