



UPDATES

SIMBA study shares preliminary findings at early career researcher talk

On July 23rd, Angus de Wilton, Mazvita Maud, and David Hettle presented an Early Career Researcher talk on the SIMBA study, sharing some exciting early findings as the study nears the end of its first year. After providing a historical overview of the relationship between tuberculosis (TB) and muscle, Angus and Mazvita walked the audience through the quantitative arm of SIMBA, which explores two main questions: *What is the effect of TB on human muscle?* and *How does this change as people recover?*

The study recruited 75 people with TB at diagnosis, and two-month follow-up visits are currently ongoing. Muscle mass, strength, and power are being measured using a range of tools—including imaging, muscle performance testing, anthropometry, and assessments of functional impairment and disability. Early results show that severe TB disease is associated with impairments in grip strength and jump power, as well as broader functional limitations. The study is also looking at the impact of TB on physical appearance, with many participants reporting visible changes to their skin both before and after starting treatment.

Dave and Modester then shared findings from qualitative workshops that explored TB's impact on participants' physical function and daily activities, and their views on what recovery and 'success' mean after a TB diagnosis. Reported symptoms extended beyond those directly caused by TB—such as coughing and fatigue—to include low motivation, low mood, and the effects of stigma and discrimination, which disrupted social, community, and family roles.

Participants two months into treatment described promising signs of recovery. However, those 12 months post-diagnosis (at least six months after completing treatment) shared that many physical, psychological, and social consequences of TB still lingered. These challenges became harder to manage after being discharged from TB services—usually at the end of treatment, which is defined as “success” by the WHO. Rather than seeing treatment completion as a definitive endpoint, participants viewed it as simply the point when medication ends—emphasizing that ongoing support is still needed, though often unavailable.

With continued follow-up and more workshops planned, the SIMBA team is excited to keep learning about how TB and its treatment affect people in Zimbabwe, and how they can be better supported throughout their recovery journey.



Highlights from the Simba study presentation

INSIGHT study highlights the power of Therapeutic Alliance in mental health care

On 9 July, the *INvestigating depression Symptom reduction throuGH understanding the role of Therapeutic alliance* (INSIGHT) study team met with Friendship Bench staff to share updates and reflect on early findings from their collaborative research. Embedded within the Friendship Bench programme, the INSIGHT study explores the role of the therapeutic alliance in reducing depression symptoms through both face-to-face and digital therapy.

The Friendship Bench model is renowned for training community grandmothers—gogos—to deliver problem-solving therapy on wooden benches in primary care and community settings across Zimbabwe. INSIGHT aims to understand what makes these interventions effective, focusing on the lived experiences of both the gogos and their clients, with particular attention to how therapeutic alliance influences mental health outcomes.

So far, the team has:

- Completed a systematic review confirming the importance of therapeutic alliance in improving mental health, while highlighting the lack of culturally relevant tools to measure it.
- Concluded data collection involving in-depth interviews with 41 participants—including service users, gogos, and programme staff—from both urban and rural sites.

Early findings reveal that the gogos' trusted community status fosters openness and trust. However, participants also raised concerns around confidentiality and the need for safe, private spaces. Additionally, the team noted tensions between strictly following the therapy manual and adapting to users' needs.

The team is now moving into the analysis phase and preparing for Sub-study 3, which will focus on the culturally sensitive translation and validation of therapeutic alliance tools. This will pave the way for Sub-study 4—a prospective cohort study that will quantitatively assess the impact of therapeutic alliance on depression outcomes.

The INSIGHT team extends sincere thanks to all study participants, THRU ZIM colleagues, and the Friendship Bench team for their invaluable collaboration.

For questions or feedback, please contact:

lovender.kunaka@kcl.ac.uk

sam.gnanapragasam@kcl.ac.uk



INSIGHT Study Meeting in July 2025 – Lovender Kunaka, Sam Gnanapragasam, Dorothy Msipa, Dixon Chibanda

Welcome Dr Kimberly Lakin

THRU ZIM is excited to welcome Dr Kimberly Lakin, a Senior Research Associate and social scientist from the University of Bristol, who will be based in Harare for the next couple of weeks.

While at THRU ZIM, she will be supporting work on the Fractures E3 follow up project and contributing to the KOSHESAI study. Kimberly is also beginning to engage with emerging work on neglect and abuse among older adults, helping to shape future research in this important but often overlooked area.

We're looking forward to collaborating and learning from her during her time with us



Dr Kimberly Lakin

Building Capacity in Qualitative Research

From the 14th to the 17th of July, THRU ZIM hosted a hands-on qualitative data analysis training led by Dr. Kimberly Lakin and Dr. Rudo Chingono. The four-day workshop brought together 8 qualitative researchers working across several studies including KOSHESAI and Insight.

The facilitators guided participants through the key stages of qualitative data analysis emphasizing a thematic analysis approach informed by theoretical frameworks such as the MRC Process Evaluation Framework. Sessions were highly interactive, blending lectures, dynamic group discussions, and practical exercises using real data. Participants refined their skills, moving from initial coding of transcripts to developing overarching themes and drawing meaningful insights.

Attendees appreciated the clear structure, supportive environment, and the opportunity to deepen their skills in qualitative thinking and interpretation. One attendee noted, "It was great to walk through the process with facilitators who understand the realities of participants experiences in different contexts."

This training was part of THRU ZIM's ongoing efforts to strengthen staff capacity



Kimberly explaining coding frameworks at a recent training

THRU ZIM launches nutrition quarter with Fruit Friday

THRU ZIM launched the Nutrition quarter of the Wellbeing series this July with a focus on promoting healthier habits in simple, enjoyable ways.

The new theme kicked off on 18 July with the first-ever Fruit Friday, where staff were invited to collect a fresh piece of fruit from a colorful display in the garden. It was a refreshing start to the day and a fun way to encourage small steps toward better nutrition.

Throughout the Nutrition quarter, staff can look forward to:

- *A weekly fruit offering every Friday*
- *An informative talk on incorporating healthy indigenous and traditional foods into everyday meals*
- *Healthy recipes and practical nutrition tips shared internally*

Staff members with recipe ideas or suggestions for the series are encouraged to reach out to Kate Mattick.



A fruitful start to the Nutrition wellness quarter

Stretch and breath session with Angus

As part of the ongoing commitment to staff wellbeing, THRU ZIM recently hosted the second Stretch and Breathe session—a short, guided break designed to help staff reset their minds and bodies in the middle of a busy day.

With gentle stretches, deep breathing, and a calm atmosphere, the session offered a moment of pause, encouraging mindfulness and physical ease. Afterward, participants shared how even a few minutes of movement helped improve focus, relieve tension, and boost their mood.



Angus led a peaceful mid-morning pause, guiding staff through gentle stretches and deep breaths.

Congratulations Dr. Kevin Martin



Dr Kevin Martin

We're delighted to share that Kevin Martin successfully passed his PhD with no corrections—an exceptional accomplishment.

His thesis, titled *“Investigating point-of-care diagnostics for sexually transmitted infections and antimicrobial resistance in primary care in Zimbabwe (IPSAZ),”* explored a testing strategy among 1,000 pregnant women attending antenatal care in Harare.

The study offered point-of-care testing for Chlamydia, Gonorrhoea, Trichomoniasis, Hepatitis B, HIV, and Syphilis, with Gonorrhoea isolates also tested for antimicrobial resistance.

The results aimed to inform the use of point-of-care STI tests, contribute to national STI management guidelines, and support the development of a gonorrhoea antimicrobial resistance surveillance programme in Zimbabwe.

Well done, Dr. Martin.

Mary Kabasa attains her driver's license

There's a new driver in town!

Congratulations to Mary Kabasa, one of THRU ZIM's valued staff members, who recently passed her driving test. She was supported through the Smile & Shine EDCTP initiative to complete her course.

She gushed about this life-changing opportunity “My work involves cleaning offices and helping around — this opportunity gives me a whole new area to explore.”



Road ready and radiant — Makorokoto, Congratulations, Mary

First issue of the SOFAR newsletter now out

We are delighted to share the first edition of the **Southern Africa Research Capacity Network (SOFAR) newsletter**, marking a major milestone for this exciting regional initiative.

SOFAR brings together partners from Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Mozambique—working closely with European collaborators—to support MSc, PhD, and postdoctoral researchers focused on infectious diseases and health systems. The network is grounded in the values of equity, excellence, and sustainability, and aims to strengthen African-led research capacity through interdisciplinary training, mentorship, and collaborative projects.

Read the full newsletter [here](#)

Learn more about SOFAR at: www.sofarafrica.org.



Welcome new employees and volunteers

We're excited to welcome two new members to the growing THRU ZIM team!

- **Kudakwashe Geoffrey Chadzingwa** joins us as a Procurement Officer.
- **Rebekah Soper** is a volunteer nurse working with Neotree on the Golden Hour Project.

We look forward to their contributions and wish them every success in their roles!



Kudakwashe



Rebekah

PICTURE OF THE MONTH



Say hello to “THRU QUIZIM” — Karlos, Stephanie, Kevin, Ellen and Rebekah — our unofficial quiz crew!
They came in 2nd place at Quiz Simba Night at Organikks.

Want to join the fun? Scan the QR code



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Wellcome Discovery Grant awarded for new study: ARTFUL AGEING

We're proud to share that Professor Rashida Ferrand has been awarded a Wellcome Discovery Award for a new study, ARTFUL AGEING. The study will investigate how HIV and long-term antiretroviral therapy influence ageing in children and adolescents growing up with HIV.

PUBLICATIONS

[A cluster-randomized trial of interventions for adolescent mental disorders in Zimbabwe.](#) BMC Psychiatry. Beji-Chauke, R., Simms, V., Abas, M., Muzariri, K., Mavhu, W., Manganah, C., Verhey, R., Chiriseri, E., Dambi, J.M., Araya, R., Weiss, H.A., Cowan, F.M., & Chibanda, D. (2025) Article 673.

[Incidence of and outcomes of pregnancy in adolescents with perinatally-acquired HIV infection in Southern Africa.](#)

Dzavakwa NV, Chisenga M, Banda-Mabuda H, Namukonda C, Kasonka L, Bandason T, Redzo N, Mujuru HA, Kranzer K, Simms V, Ferrand RA. Int J STD AIDS. 2025 Jun 27;9564624251352066. doi: 10.1177/09564624251352066. Online ahead of print. PMID: 40577386 Free article.

[Integrated community-based HIV and sexual and reproductive health services for youth: a cluster-randomized trial.](#)

Ferrand RA, Dauya E, Chikwari CD, Bandason T, Bernays S, Mackworth-Young C, Doyle AM, Grundy C, Indravudh P, Terris-Presholt F, Mavodza CV, Mugurungi O, Apollo T, Ncube G, Larsson L, McCarthy O, Simms V, Tembo M, Kranzer K, Hayes RJ. Nat Med. 2025 Jun 24;10.1038/s41591-025-03762-z. doi: 10.1038/s41591-025-03762-z. Online ahead of print. PMID: 40555749 Free PMC article.

[Characterizing diamond detectors for various dose and dose rate measurements in scanned carbon and oxygen beams.](#)

Karle C, Verona-Rinati G, Brons S, Cee R, Scheloske S, Schömers C, Kranzer R, Haberer T, Marinelli M, Mairani A, Tessonnier T. Med Phys. 2025 Jun 2. doi: 10.1002/mp.17893. Online ahead of print. PMID: 40454743

[Decentralized TB diagnostic testing with Truenat MTB Plus and MTB-RIF Dx vs. hub-and-spoke GeneXpert MTB/RIF Ultra in Mozambique and Tanzania: a cost and cost-effectiveness analysis.](#)

Malhotra A, Elisio D, Machiana A, Lwilla A, Hella J, Young N, Khosa C, Cossa M, Nguenha D, Mgaya R, Balate D, Watson M, Leukes V, Fekadu L, Bashir S, Penn-Nicholson A, Ruhwald M, Larsson L, Sharma M, Kranzer K, Denkinge CM, Dowdy D; T.B. CAPT consortium. PLOS Glob Public Health. 2025 May 30;5(5):e0004724. doi: 10.1371/journal.pgph.0004724. eCollection 2025. PMID: 40446169 Free PMC article.

[Barriers to and facilitators of linkage to care following hypertension and diabetes screening among health workers in Zimbabwe: A mixed method study.](#)

Larsson L, Chingono RMS, Calderwood CJ, Nzvere FP, Marambire ET, Kavenga F, Sibanda S, Kanengoni B, Redzo N, Simms V, Ndhlovu CE, Mujuru H, Rusakaniko S, Ferrand RA, Sabapathy K, Kranzer K. PLOS Glob Public Health. 2025 Apr 29;5(4):e0004513. doi: 10.1371/journal.pgph.0004513. eCollection 2025. PMID: 40300032 Free PMC article.

[Body mass index trajectories and association with tuberculosis risk in a cohort of household contacts in Southern Africa.](#)

Larsson L, Calderwood CJ, Marambire ET, Held K, Banze D, Mfinanga A, Madziva K, Walsh P, Jacob J, Fernandez FT, Lungu P, Mesic A, Khosa C, Minja LT, Mutsvangwa J, Bhargava M, Lauseker M, Gupta RK, Heinrich N, Kranzer K. Clin Infect Dis. 2025 Apr 28;ciaf222. doi: 10.1093/cid/ciaf222. Online ahead of print. PMID: 40293814

[Rapid bacterial identification and resistance detection using a low complexity molecular diagnostic platform in Zimbabwe.](#)

Mwaturura T, Olaru ID, Chimhini G, Bwakura-Dangarembizi M, Mangiza M, Chimhuya S, Sado B, Katunga J, Tarupiwa A, Juru A, Mashe T, Pasi C, Chuchu V, Gansallo S, Gleeson B, Fitzgerald F, Ferreyra C, Kranzer K. PLOS Glob Public Health. 2025 Apr 9;5(4):e0004343. doi: 10.1371/journal.pgph.0004343. eCollection 2025. PMID: 40202992 Free PMC article.

Share your news, publications, pictures, announcements: ellenchiyindiko@gmail.com

THANK YOU!