

# Caprisa observes 20 years of scientific excellence

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FOR 20 years the Centre for the Aids Programme of Research in South Africa (Caprisa) has been at the forefront of strengthening HIV, Aids and TB seminal research on the continent.

International scientists will join the medical research organisation, co-founded by epidemiologists and professors Salim and Quarraisha Abdoool Karim, in marking two decades of scientific excellence.

The symposium, scheduled for next week at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre Complex (ICC), will also see Salim launch his book, *Standing Up for Science*, published by Pan Macmillan.

Salim served as the SA government's chief scientific adviser on Covid-19 and as the first chairperson of the Ministerial Advisory Committee for Covid-19. He provided advice on Covid-19 to several African countries through the Africa Task Force on Coro-



A LAB technician examines a sample. | SUPPLIED

navirus and served as a commissioner on the AU's Commission on Covid-19.

Caprisa was established in 2002 during the height of the HIV epidemic and Aids denialism in South Africa as a multi-institutional independent non-profit Aids research organisation. At the time, the organisation facilitated the scientific training of more than 600 scientists in South Africa, many of

whom are now in leadership positions.

Its mandate is to address Aids challenges in Africa by reducing HIV-TB co-infection, deaths and preventing new HIV infections in young women.

Quarraisha said scientists had provided the first scientific evidence and proof of concept showing that antiretrovirals prevent the sexual transmission of HIV. She said integrated TB-HIV

treatment halves co-infection deaths which is included in the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines on HIV-TB co-infection treatment.

"Caprisa is renowned internationally for outstanding evidence-based contributions through its epidemiological, pathogenesis and treatment studies leading to its global reputation for research excellence in infectious diseases. Seminal research paved the way for pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) which is widely used in HIV prevention today," she said.

Scientists who will be sharing their knowledge at the symposium include: Ambassador John Nkengasong, the US Global Aids co-ordinator and special representative for Global Health Diplomacy; Professor Peter Piot, special adviser on Covid-19 to the president of the European Commission and EU chief scientific adviser on epidemics; as well as Professor Jeremy Farrar, chief scientist at the WHO, among others.

Professor Françoise Barré-Sinoussi, Nobel laureate and chairperson of

the Caprisa Scientific Advisory Board, acknowledged the significant contributions made by the organisation.

"We are celebrating 20 years of extraordinary achievement in responding to HIV, HIV-TB co-infection, and more recently, Covid-19. Caprisa's work is setting a new path in global health and is playing a pivotal role in promoting a network of research organisations in Africa," she said.

Caprisa's media spokesperson, Smita Maharaj, said during the Covid-19 pandemic, their scientists pivoted and provided scientific leadership, epidemiological analyses and public education, placing South African science on the global platform.

"Currently, Caprisa is continuing pioneering multidisciplinary work on broadly neutralising antibodies (bnAbs) in HIV prevention. The discovery of the Caprisa 256 bnAb provides the opportunity to evaluate passive immunisation as a potential long-acting injectable HIV prevention strategy," said Maharaj.