

African Directors, The Malaria Capacity Development Consortium (Phase 3)

Background and introduction

Although significant financial investments are being made in malaria control and elimination in Africa, there remains a concern that these could be wasted due to a lack of trained personnel in endemic countries. Qualified and experienced staff are needed to conduct applied research into the best ways to deploy currently available tools for malaria control, to develop new tools and to find ways of supporting the health systems that will be needed to deliver these tools.

The Malaria Capacity Development Consortium (MCDC), established in 2008 by grants from the Wellcome Trust and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, has built on lessons learnt during a previous capacity building programme supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Gates Malaria Partnership (GMP). This was established in 2000 with the aim of improving the ability of African scientists to undertake high quality research relevant to the treatment or prevention of malaria.

MCDC is currently a consortium of five African universities situated in Ghana, Malawi, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda respectively, each of which has substantial experience in malaria research, and three northern partners in Denmark and the UK. During the first phase of MCDC (2008-2013), the consortium has supported 18 PhD students based at one of the partner African universities and also 30 post doctoral scientists who graduated through the GMP PhD programme and are now known as MCDC investigators. MCDC

investigators are provided with access to small grants, personal development planning and mentoring with a senior colleague. In addition to its provision of support for individual scientists, MCDC has contributed in various ways to overall strengthening of post-graduate training in the partner African universities.

In 2013, MCDC received a cost - extension from the Wellcome Trust which will provide support to the consortium until the middle of 2015. Additional activities that will be undertaken during this period include -

- a. Strengthening research management at both the individual and institutional level.
- b. Establishing sustainable career development support structures for researchers within each institution, by setting up career development groups to develop and drive career development support locally.

It is anticipated that in July or early August 2014, the Wellcome Trust will issue a call for a new round of funding for its capacity strengthening initiatives. This is likely to be a highly competitive open call for proposals with the leadership and management of each consortium resting with key individuals from Sub-Saharan Africa.

In preparation for the new call, MCDC is seeking to identify one or two individuals to lead Phase 3 of the new programme. Preliminary discussions within the consortium have suggested that because of the rapid expansion in the number of effective malaria research groups in Africa, it would be appropriate for the next phase of the project to be based on two regional networks, one in west and the other in eastern

and/or southern Africa. This would facilitate regional collaboration in research and capacity development and split the administrative load required to run effectively a pan-African consortium. However, it is proposed that close links would be sustained between the two regional networks which would join in collaborative activities when these are appropriate. It is possible that the Wellcome Trust might insist on there being one lead person for the project in which case the two regional directors would become director and co-director respectively. The potential role of each regional director, and the experience such a person would need to be able to fill this role effectively are considered below.

Role of the Director

The regional director will provide academic and management leadership for the partners within their network. He/she will work with existing and/or new partner institutions to develop a funding proposal for a new programme of malaria related capacity strengthening and research activities within his/her region with the aim of developing world-leading centres/networks of excellence.

Structure and Reporting

It is envisaged that the regional directors will report initially to the MCDC Steering Committee, comprising representatives of the partner institutions, and finally to the Wellcome Trust.

An international advisory committee will be established to advise the directors on progress of the MCDC. The group will include senior academics, representatives from other international capacity strengthening programmes and will meet once every 12-18 months.

Each director will lead a core management team who will support the activities of the consortium and facilitate collaboration across networks.

Each regional director will be based in one of the partner institutions in SSA expected to spend at least **0.6 full time equivalent** on consortium activities for the duration of the programme.

Specific responsibilities

The regional directors will be responsible for developing an LOI for a new Strategic Award to the Wellcome Trust, and, if this is successful, for the development and submission of a full proposal in early 2015. If this proposal is successful the regional directors will be expected to -

- Develop a strategic plan that will allow the consortium to meet the objectives set out in the proposal.
- Establish collaborative research capacity development activities within their own network and across the consortium.
- Facilitate collaborative activities (research, training etc.) within their network and the wider consortium.
- Establish links with other partners (regional, sub-regional or worldwide) who can provide support in areas where this is needed.
- Represent the consortium both nationally and internationally. The directors will act as spokesperson and key media contact.
- Overseeing the recruitment, retention and motivation of the consortium secretariat, and managing core staff.
- The directors, acting together, will be responsible for the overall financial management of the consortium.

Qualifications &
Experience

The Person

Regional directors will be expected to have the following background and experience:

Academic

- A PhD in a relevant area of science or an equivalent qualification.
- A record of high quality malaria research recognised internationally.
- A publication record appropriate to a person at their stage of career.
- A proven record in securing research funding.
- Experience of post-graduate supervision, including acting as a PhD supervisor.
- Good communication skills and an ability to interact effectively with the media.

Managerial

- Evidence of successful management, including financial management of substantial research grants.
- An ability to manage staff within and outside their own institution.
- An ability to think strategically.
- An ability to interact effectively with donors.

Networking

- Previous experience of managing collaboration between multi-disciplinary and physically disparate teams.
- Experience of developing and maintaining networks and relationships internationally.