

University of Oxford news release | For immediate release

Vaccine for TB receives a \$1.5 million funding boost

The Oxford-run VALIDATE Network has received \$1.5 million in funding for its tuberculosis vaccine work from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Worldwide, tuberculosis (TB) remains one of the top 10 causes of death, killing around 1.4 million people per year. An effective vaccine for TB is one of the primary goals of the VALIDATE Network, an international research network aiming to accelerate vaccine development for complex intracellular pathogens that are often neglected. The VALIDATE Network's TB vaccine work has now received a \$1.5 million funding boost from the Gates Foundation.

The money will support fellowships, grants and training for VALIDATE Network TB researchers, particularly female researchers, early-career researchers and researchers in low- and middle-income countries. By supporting these researchers to continue their work, the Gates Foundation hopes to accelerate the development of a robust pipeline of next-generation TB vaccine candidates, as well as boost the career development of the young TB scientists who do this vital work.

The VALIDATE Network, led by Professor Helen McShane from the University of Oxford, Professor Helen Fletcher from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Professor Samantha Sampson from the University of Stellenbosch, has always prioritised career development for its members alongside the scientific aims of vaccine development.

With around 450 members in 68 countries, the global network is an engaged and interactive community, offering both scientific opportunity and career support for its members, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. By encouraging cross-pathogen, cross-continent, cross-discipline and cross-species collaborations alongside supporting member's development, the Network hopes to generate new ideas, share information and ultimately develop effective vaccines more quickly and easily in the future.

The new Gates Foundation funding will also enhance collaboration with the CTVD (Collaboration for TB Vaccine Discovery), an international network of scientists dedicated to fostering innovation, cooperation, and collaboration in the TB vaccine space, opening up further opportunities for learning, training and discovery.

Professor Helen McShane, Professor of Vaccinology at the University of Oxford and Director of VALIDATE, says: 'We are delighted that the Gates Foundation has recognised the value of the VALIDATE Network that we have established, both scientifically and to support career development. We look forward to working with the Foundation to continue to support career development, with a shared focus particularly on women and low- and middle-income setting researchers.'

Professor Samantha Sampson, Principal Investigator in Mycobacteriology at the Division of Molecular Biology and Human Genetics, University of Stellenbosch in South Africa and Co-Director on the Gates Foundation funding, says: 'I am very excited about this opportunity to take a more active role in the VALIDATE Network. I am also very grateful for the support from the Gates Foundation, which will allow us to build on the already-strong network to further TB vaccine development through supporting research, collaboration and capacity development.'

While the current Gates Foundation funding focuses on the VALIDATE Network's TB vaccine work, the Network is working on vaccine candidates for a range of intracellular neglected pathogens, including leishmaniasis, melioidosis and leprosy. These debilitating and deadly diseases are often forgotten, despite the widespread suffering they cause around the world, particularly in low-income countries and for those in poverty. The VALIDATE Network plans to secure matching funding from other sources for their other research priorities in the future.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

For more information or to speak to one of the researchers, contact Gen Juillet, Media Relations Manager, University of Oxford, gen.juillet@admin.ox.ac.uk

About the VALIDATE Network

The VALIDATE Network aims to promote vaccine research and development (R&D) for complex intracellular pathogens that cause significant disease burden in low and middle-income countries (LMIC). Our initial focus is on *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* (which causes TB), *Leishmania* species (leishmaniasis), *Burkholderia pseudomallei* (melioidosis) and *Mycobacterium leprae* (leprosy).

The Network's priorities lie in bringing together researchers from different specialities, different countries, different institutes and who work on different pathogens, with the aim of together making significant progress towards vaccines against our focus pathogens. www.validate-network.org

About the University of Oxford

Oxford University has been placed number 1 in the *Times Higher Education* World University Rankings for the fifth year running, and at the heart of this success is our ground-breaking research and innovation. Oxford is world-famous for research excellence and home to some of the most talented people from across the globe. Our work helps the lives of millions, solving real-world problems through a huge network of partnerships and collaborations. The breadth and interdisciplinary nature of our research sparks imaginative and inventive insights and solutions. www.ox.ac.uk

About the Division of Molecular Biology and Human Genetics, University of Stellenbosch

The Division of Molecular Biology and Human Genetics (MBHG) is a state-of-the-art research unit within the Department of Biomedical Sciences at Stellenbosch University's Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences. Our team focuses on two main research fields, namely tuberculosis (TB) and inherited genetic disorders, subdivided into several research focus areas that utilize innovative molecular techniques to bridge the gap between basic fundamental and its clinical application. The impact of this work and translation into clinically relevant tools will enable faster and more accurate health management strategies to improved patient outcomes. To this end, the MBHG division will continue to challenge dogma, develop new technologies, collaborate more widely to move knowledge forward to inform policy to improve quality of life and reduce the cost of health care. www.sun.ac.za/mbhg

About the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation