RAND WATER AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL SIGN A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

Rand Water (RW) and the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Water and Health, paving the way for an important partnership to benefit public health in South Africa.

While initial RW-SAMRC discussions were spurred by a mutual aspiration to contribute to halting the spread of COVID-19 in South Africa, both institutions recognise that their partnership responds to appeals by international institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO) for collaborations between development and health sectors to improve public health.

Professor Hamanth Kasan of Rand Water said, “although COVID-19 is not a waterborne disease, the need for continuous supply of good quality water to mitigate risks of transmission is critical. Public health protection, particularly waterborne disease/s is paramount and this MOU will unlock key synergies through scientific collaboration. The scientists from both organisations are excited by the prospect and opportunities to collaborate on research projects. In addition, this MOU will enhance and sustain Rand Water’s solid track record and commitment for provision of safe water for life for its customers and consumers”.

After the MOU was concluded, Professor Angela Mathee of the SAMRC said the two organisations, therefore, fully intend to build a long-term programme of joint activities in the field of water and health.
There are immediate opportunities, said Prof Mathee, for a joint consideration of solutions to major South African public health concerns such as diarrhoeal disease, in which water, sanitation and hygiene education may play a key role. In this regard, the MOU emphasizes joint activities related to research on water and public health.

It also emphasizes research capacity development, public awareness campaigns and water and health policy enterprise. At the outset, Rand Water has seconded a student to the SAMRC to build capacity in environmental epidemiology through participation in research projects related to wastewater surveillance for SARS-CoV-2 RNA, and increasing climate-readiness at schools through improved water access.

“Partnerships between institutions such as Rand Water and the SAMRC will gain in importance as climate change unfolds. Longer and warmer summers and an increase in the frequency of heatwaves are predicted to be a feature of life in southern Africa in the coming decades, more so than in other parts of the world,” said Prof Mathee.

In this regard, she said, access to ample and safe supplies of water will constitute a primary defence mechanism in settings such as schools, homes, taxi ranks, clinics and sporting facilities.

She added that scientists at both Rand Water and the SAMRC look forward to joint discussions to set water and health action priorities and to contributing to policies for improved water-related health in South Africa.

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