Supporting the wider community
ALUMNI PROFILE

Following the recent launch of the CSC’s Public Health Professional Network on LinkedIn, three alumni explain how they have had an impact in the field of health care – from international policy implementation to improving community health provision.

Professor Rifat Atun (1982 Commonwealth Medical Scholar from Cyprus, MB BS Clinical Medicine, Guy’s, King’s and St Thomas’ Schools of Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences) is currently Professor of International Health Management and Head of the Health Management Group at Imperial College London. He heads a multidisciplinary group with research focusing on innovation in health systems both in the UK and internationally.

Rifat says that his Commonwealth Scholarship has been ‘critically important’ to his career in medical research. His post at Imperial gives him the opportunity to improve health care for those most in need. ‘The research, which spans more than 20 countries in four continents, includes collaborations with leading universities and institutions abroad.’

Between 2008 and 2012, Rifat was a member of the Executive Management Team of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, based in Geneva, Switzerland. ‘I led the Strategy, Performance and Evaluation Cluster. The experience was most rewarding; with a portfolio of more than USD 22 billion in 150 countries, the Global Fund rapidly established itself as the largest international funder of health programmes globally, with the objective of addressing the HIV, tuberculosis and malaria epidemics.

‘An exciting aspect was chairing the Phase 2 Panel, which assessed the performance of Global Fund-supported grants and made recommendations for continued funding for additional periods of three years or more.’ The panel’s decisions enabled more than 3.5 million people with AIDS to receive antiretroviral treatment, funded the distribution of more than 100 million insecticide nets, and ensured the provision of treatment to more than 2 million patients with tuberculosis – all within the space of few years.

Rifat’s recent policy research has identified inefficiency in the allocation of malaria funding (with the University of Oxford), and demonstrated the heath and economic benefits of investing in antiretroviral treatment for those affected by AIDS in Africa (with Harvard University).

Professor Wah-Yun Low (1989 Commonwealth Scholar from Malaysia, PhD Psychology, University of Surrey) is a Professor of Psychology at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya, Malaysia. In addition to teaching both undergraduate and postgraduate students, her research interests include sexual and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, ageing, and men’s health, and she undertakes research consultancies with local government and international agencies.

Wah-Yun Low, 1989
Commonwealth Scholar from Malaysia

Wah-Yun Low is also Head of the Scholarly Publication Support Unit at the university, which provides a scientific editing service and trains researchers, academics, and postgraduate students in communicating the results of their research effectively and publishing their research in relevant research journals.

Wah-Yun led a UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) research consultancy project dealing with the impact of HIV/AIDS on marginalised communities in Malaysia, which had a profound effect on her personally. ‘I am humbled by the experience gained mixing with people living with HIV/AIDS and learning how they have fought to maintain their quality of life and their rights to healthcare services, and dealt with the stigma and discrimination they face in society.’ At the end of the project, a policy brief was presented to UNFPA and discussions were held with government agencies, NGOs, and civil society organisations in the field to implement programmes aimed at improving the quality of life of these communities.

Remmy Mukonka (2010 Commonwealth Professional Fellow from Zambia, Public Health and Education, George House Trust) is an HIV/AIDS Educational Trainer at the Ministry of Education in Zambia. As well as providing HIV/AIDS communications and institutional training, Remmy undertakes countrywide provision of technical guidance on HIV/AIDS programmes, relationship building, and grant management. Implementing behavioural change management involves working with teachers, support staff, and young people to accelerate the education sector’s response to HIV/AIDS.

Remmy Mukonka, 2010
Commonwealth Professional Fellow from Zambia

‘My Professional Fellowship exposed me to top management systems, people skills, prudent use of resources, and change management. One year after my return, the Ministry of Education identified my abilities and promoted me to head HIV programming at a national level, a position that gives me the privilege to advise on and technically guide the strategic direction of the Ministry on HIV and AIDS.’

Directly as a result of the mentoring he received during his Professional Fellowship, Remmy has acquired skills in dealing with policy issues and is now leading a review of the Ministry’s workplace policy on HIV/AIDS. ‘My work now is recognised at a regional level by UNESCO and UNICEF. This has been the greatest impact from my fellowship and I remain greatly and profoundly indebted to the George House Trust.’

Commonwealth Scholarships News