

## **Reciprocity in Action**

### **Akwatu Khenti and the Evolution of CAMH's International Health Program**

It's 8 a.m. and Akwatu Khenti is fresh off the phone from a teleconference with partners in four countries— Austria, Brazil, Egypt and Sweden. It's just another day in the life of CAMH's work on the international stage, a role that has grown steadily since 2002.

Akwatu, CAMH's Director of International Health Programs coordinates a working group on community-based drug treatment in under-resourced areas for the United Nation's Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The conference callers also discussed their roles in putting into action the next phase of a global initiative to build drug treatment capacity.

“Our core philosophy is **reciprocity in action**. We share our expertise and experiences but we also learn from our partners. Every relationship has to be a two-way street for us to define it as both effective and successful,” explains Akwatu. “Working with equally committed health professionals, in very different and challenging environments, helps us to interrogate some of our own assumptions, build skills for critical reflection and gain varied opportunities for personal as well as professional growth.”



*Akwatu Khenti and Dr. Paul Garfinkel traveled to Brazil recently to sign an agreement with their partners. Left to right: Karen McDonald, Minister - Counsellor at the Canadian embassy in Brasilia, Brazil; Guillermo Rishchynki, the Canadian Ambassador; Paul Garfinkel, President and CEO of CAMH; Akwatu Khenti, CAMH Director of International Health Programs; Juliana de Paula, representative of the Municipality of Fortaleza, Ceara; and, Ana Carla do Valle Mello, Officer / Agent for CIDA.*

CAMH is represented directly or indirectly through International Health Programs in 17 countries, many of which are in Latin America and the Caribbean. The programs are diverse and can range from basic and advanced addictions training in the Caribbean to a two-month study visits to CAMH for academics.

Akwatu was first tasked by CAMH in January 2002 to undertake a feasibility study on the prospects of establishing an international health program at the Centre. In July 2002, he was appointed as the director of a pilot unit.

Since then this pilot has taken off as an established program at CAMH with a mandate to train, share research findings, provide evaluation support, learn from its partners and to help other jurisdictions develop sustainable solutions in dealing with mental health and addiction care and health promotion.

CAMH's International Health program has signed international agreements with multilateral bodies, ministries, hospitals and municipalities the world over. Akwatu's group has undertaken continuing professional and medical education on subjects as diverse as motivational interviewing and first episode psychosis. They've worked with a range of professionals, from physicians and nurses in primary care centres in Puente Alto, Chile to educators from all over Sri Lanka.



*The TREATNET (International Network of Drug Dependence Treatment and Rehabilitation Resource Centres) working group on community-based treatment, part of the United Nation's Office of Drugs and Crime.*

**Front Row sitting** (l-r): Graziella Barbosa Barreiros, Director, Psychosocial Attention Centre for Alcohol and Other Drugs, Brazil; Anders Tengström, Deputy Director, Maria Ungdom-Stockholm and the Karolinska Institute; and Akwatu Khenti, CAMH Director of International Health Programs.

**Back row standing** (l-r): Emad Hamdi, for the General Secretariat of Mental Health, Egypt; Anja Busse, Project Coordinator for UNODC; and Paula Liljeberg, Director Maria Ungdom, Adolescent Addiction Centre, Sweden.

“My biggest goal for this department is to establish firm foundations for collaborative and comprehensive capacity building both abroad and at home. We want to enhance competencies from clinical care to health promotion to policy,” says Akwatu.

“Self-care and cultural competencies are also essential components of our evolving vision as well as change leadership...especially in the area of primary care. Strengthening addiction and mental health in primary care, with lessons from both North and South, is both a passion as well as a philosophical commitment,” he adds.

This year, Akwatu and Acting Research Director Louis Gliksman coordinated a 2 1/2-month **training institute**, supported by the federal Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), to build drug-related research capacity across Latin America and the Caribbean.

Akwatu met each member of the delegation individually to ensure they got the experience they came for and to receive their feedback for improvements next year. “Ideally, I would love to have a program like this for extremely under-resourced regions such as sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia ” says Akwatu when asked what items are on his wish list for International Health. “It would be fantastic to have the funds to build critical research, clinical, training and policy capacities for disparate regions coming together at CAMH and enriching CAMH people through the sharing that would inevitable occur”.

In October, he organized a symposium for World Mental Health Day, in partnership with Mood and Anxiety Programs, with a focus on South Asia. He will be traveling with members of the Sri Lankan Steering Committee to plan a next phase of this national program. Symposiums in India are on the agenda and plans for partnership building and training in Africa are also in the works.

Asked about the person he most admires, Akwatu offered two people who were his constant sources of inspiration: Marcus Garvey and Shakespeare. Garvey’s organizational genius and oratory inspire Akwatu and he could recall his words “*let earth and sky be your yardstick and eternity your measure, there is no height to which you cannot climb by using the active intelligence of your minds.*” Shakespeare was another source of inspiration for him with such profundities as “*Things won are done, joy’s soul lies in the doing*” and “*there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.*”