

Public Health Collaborates With Suriname University

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Pledging to coordinate efforts in a wide range of teaching and research activities, the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Anton de Kom Universiteit van Suriname (AdeKUS), in Paramaribo, Suriname.



At the agreement's signing are, from left, Pierre Buekens, W.H. Watkins Professor and dean of the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine; Allan Li Fo Sjoe of Suriname; Maureen Lichtveld, professor and chair of the Tulane Department of Environmental Health Sciences; and Dr. Glen Oehlers of Suriname. (Photo by Jeff Strout)

The agreement, signed at a ceremony on Saturday (Oct. 11), commits the institutions to cooperation in areas including exchanges of faculty members for research, lectures and discussions; exchanges of research scientists and graduate students for study and research; training scientists and public health professionals in basic and applied research; carrying out joint research activities; and exchanging information such as library materials and research publications.

“This summer, after almost 30 years, I visited Suriname, the country of my birth,” says Dr. Maureen Lichtveld, who holds the Freeport McMoRan Chair of Environmental Policy at Tulane and is professor and chair of the Department of Environmental Health Sciences in the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.

“I visited there at the invitation of the university to help set up the first master of public health program for the country.”

Lichtveld, who earned her medical degree from AdeKUS, was asked to look broadly at research opportunities in Suriname and more closely at the new program's curriculum.

“I also was asked to be the lead professor for the core course in environmental health science, so in July I went there to teach the course,” says Lichtveld. “While I was there, I had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Allan Li Fo Sjoe, acting president of the university board, and Dr. Glenn Oehlers, the dean of the School of Medicine, a colleague who was two years ahead of me in medical school.”

The agreement with AdeKUS is a natural fit for the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, according to Lichtveld, and it also represents the first agreement with a U.S. university that AdeKUS has signed.

“Tropical medicine is in our name because we are heavily focused on global health □ and global health very much includes the kind of public health issues that many countries including Suriname have to deal with,” Lichtveld says.

A former Dutch colony, Suriname is located on the coast of South America, near the equator. It is heavily forested and has a tropical climate year-round. Researchers in Suriname have been engaged in a number of public health projects, including an epidemiological survey among different ethnic groups in Suriname to correlate diet and cardiovascular risk factors. The university also has focused on the field of ethnobiology, the study of medicinal plants for new pharmaceutical compounds.

Other areas of collaboration will be malaria, environmental contamination and HIV and other infectious diseases.

“There is a very great interest in the cardiovascular area and hypertension, so we traverse the gamut from chronic diseases to infectious diseases and environmental health,” Lichtveld says. “In all these areas, there are unique opportunities for practice for our students, and a unique opportunity to learn. At the same time, there

is a tremendous opportunity to make a difference.”