

SA Aids researchers receive top award

WEEKLY REPORTER

A FORMER Tongaat resident who lived in Plein Street, Professor Quarraisha Abdool Karim and her husband Professor Salim Abdool Karim were named the recipients of the Institute for Human Virology (IHV) Lifetime Achievement Award for exceptional public service for their contributions to the global Aids response.

The award was presented by Dr Robert Gallo, who discovered HIV as the cause of Aids at the 19th International Meeting of the IHV on October 25 in Baltimore. U.S.

Professor Salim is the director of the Centre for the Aids Programme of Research in South Africa (Caprisa) and Professor Quarraisha is its associate scientific director. They are both professors in the field of epidemiology at Columbia University, New York and are honorary academics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

They are renowned for their tireless and distinguished scientific contributions in HIV prevention and treatment research that span nearly three decades.

The two are said to be South Africa's leading Aids researchers.

"To me both of these two renowned individuals have made some of the greatest contributions in the history of HIV/Aids in public health and epidemiology relevant to prevention and care of infected people.

"I don't know any person or persons who have done more to advance the proper care of people with HIV infection or the prevention of HIV infection among a population," said Gallo.

Their scientific contributions have focused on trying to prevent HIV in women in Africa.

Communications manager for Caprisa, Smita Maharaj said the two were the first to demonstrate that antiretrovirals can prevent sexual transmission of HIV in 2010, when they shared the results of the Caprisa 004 Tenofovir gel trial.

"The landmark Caprisa 004 study was recognised by the *Journal for Science* as one of the top 10 scientific breakthroughs in 2010. They also discovered that Tenofovir gel prevents genital herpes, the first drug shown to be effective against this disease. Currently, they are involved in developing new innovative ways of preventing HIV in women."

In a joint statement sent to the *Weekly*, both recipients said they were "deeply appreciative of the recognition by the IHV, a centre of excellence in HIV research".

Professor Salim said: "We accept the award not just on our own behalf, but in recognition of the resilience and contributions of the thousands of South Africans, who have been central, as participants in their research, to the ongoing effort to develop better and more effective HIV prevention and treatment strategies."

Professor Salim is a clinical infectious diseases epidemiologist who is widely recognised for his groundbreaking scientific contributions in HIV prevention and treatment.

He is co-inventor on patents that have been used in several HIV vaccine candidates and his clinical research on TB-HIV treatment has shaped international guidelines on the clinical management of co-infected patients.



PHOTO: SUPPLIED

With their awards (from left) Professor Salim Abdool Karim, Professor Quarraisha Abdool Karim and Doctor Robert Gallo.