



2021 Final Report

AC21 Special Project Fund (SPF) 2020: Joint Mini-Symposium and Workshop on

Natural Products for Healthy Ageing: from Molecular Targets to Therapy

Project leader: Professor Valérie Schini-Kerth, University of Strasbourg, France

Held
November 8-12, 2021

Introduction

The joint Symposium and Workshop on “**Natural Products for Healthy Ageing: from Molecular Targets to Therapy**” involved 3 partners in AC21 including:

1. Strasbourg University, France
2. Stellenbosch University, South Africa
3. Adelaide University, Australia

The aim of the joint symposium + workshop was to promote research and educational exchange on a major societal challenge linked to the progressive ageing of the population worldwide. Both events were dedicated to highlight the pivotal impact of key behaviors for healthy ageing, and focused predominantly on **Healthy food for Healthy ageing**.

The aim of the mini-symposium entitled “**Natural Products for Healthy Ageing: from Molecular Targets to Therapy**” was to provide a strong educational value with the participation of students at different levels of education (BSc, Master and PhD), junior and senior scientists as well as the general population of the host partner (Stellenbosch University) at Cape Town. It was also expected to be a great educational value for the general population by focusing the attention of the major impact of healthy versus unhealthy food on human health. The aim of the mini-workshop was to bring together senior scientists and their teams of the 3 international partners to build a collaborative research project based on the exchange of scientific knowledge and expertise in a synergistic manner.

The symposium and workshop were initially planned to be held in-person at the University of Stellenbosch in October 2020. However, due to the pandemic both events had to be postponed and replaced by a virtual symposium that was held 8-10 November, 2021 followed on 12 November by the virtual workshop amongst the 3 partners. Since the Symposium was held via an on-line platform, the 3 partners decided to open the conference, besides to scientists from the 3 partners, also to those from all over the world and to involve a professional conference organizer from South Africa (ConsultUS) to set up and manage the virtual Symposium. The flyer announcing the international Symposium was advertised among the staff and students of the 3 partners Universities and their worldwide networks, and also at AC21. Registration and attendance of the Symposium was free of charge. Information regarding the Symposium and the program are available at <https://consultus.eventsair.com/cmspreview/natural-products-for-healthy-aging-2021>



Figure 1. The flyer of the international virtual Symposium “**Natural Food for Healthy Ageing: from Molecular Targets to Therapy**” with the call of abstracts submission and information regarding the Symposium’s homepage.

The Symposium was highly successful with more than 150 participants from over 20 countries from all over the world including France, South Africa, Australia, Japan, Korea, Pakistan, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Italy, Germany, Kenya, Mauritius, Mexico, and Brazil. Prof. Valérie Schini-Kerth (University of Strasbourg) was able to travel to South Africa to join Prof Strijdom and colleagues from the Centre for Cardiometabolic Research in Africa and Division of Medical Physiology at Stellenbosch University, from where the Symposium was managed.

During the three days, both morning and afternoon sessions were chaired by members of the 3 partners. Every day consisted of 6 plenary lectures given by international leading experts, as well as 10 abstract presentations by junior scientists selected from the submitted abstracts. Each presentation was followed by a question - answer session. The plenary lectures highlighted the pivotal importance of a healthy diet rich in selected fruits and vegetables, and natural products to prevent the development of major diseases including cancer and cardiovascular diseases, and discussed the scientific evidence of the beneficial effect of the active natural compounds and the underlying mechanisms. Bench to bedside scientific evidence was covered in various groups of populations including healthy young and old subjects and patients with risk factors such as cardiometabolic diseases, and also populations from developed and developing countries, and from the North and South.

The topic of the virtual Symposium, the high quality of the scientific presentations, the active discussions, and the very well-organized virtual event were highly appreciated by the participants. The 3 partners specially appreciated the enthusiasm and the high quality of the contributions by the junior scientists. The question raised by several participants at the end of the Symposium whether it will be followed by a similar one next year stimulated the partners to think about it.



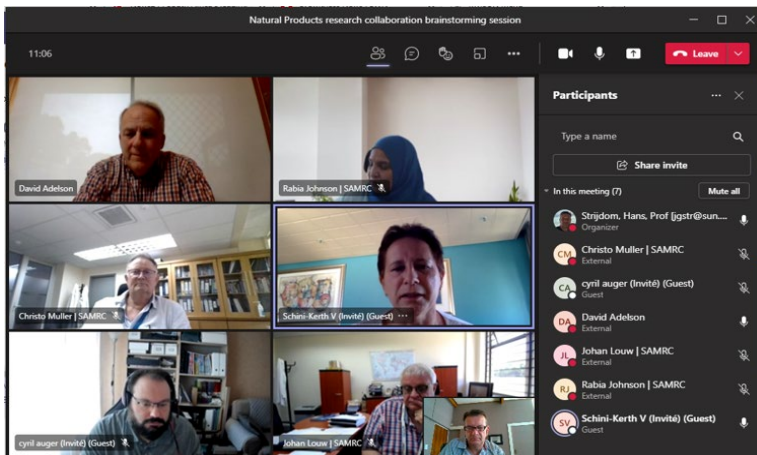
The meeting room at Stellenbosch University where the Symposium was managed. From left to right: Prof Faadiel Essop (Director: Centre for Cardiometabolic Research in Africa; Stellenbosch University); Dr Shantal Windvogel (Division Medical Physiology, Stellenbosch University); Prof Valérie Schini-Kerth (Faculty of Pharmacy,

Strasbourg University, France); Prof Hans Strijdom (Head: Division Medical Physiology and Deputy Director: Centre for Cardiometabolic Research in Africa, Stellenbosch University); Dr Gerald Maarman (Division Medical Physiology; Stellenbosch University); Prof Barbara Huisamen (Division Medical Physiology; Stellenbosch University);



Prof Hans Strijdom and Prof Valérie Schini-Kerth enjoying friendly moments after the Symposium.

Following the Symposium, the 3 partners participated in a workshop aiming to initiate future collaborations and to build a follow up joint research project to raise funds by national and international programs to further evaluate the health promoting effect of natural products both at the pre-clinical and clinical level, and continue to nourish exchange of scientists and students at the international level.



Participants of the 3 partners participating at the workshop to build a joint collaborative research network with common research projects, exchange of scientists, and to raise funds.