



ceo's review

The past year was an auspicious one for us with a major achievement and highlight of 2005 being our transformation to an independent health research organisation. The Aurum Institute is now registered as a Proudly South African, Section 21 company. We are also registered as a public benefit organisation. Coinciding with this was a change in name from Aurum Health Research to the Aurum Institute for Health Research. These changes followed on the introduction of a three-pronged strategy at the end of 2004 aimed at consolidation, delivery and growth, each of which pose unique challenges to the organisation.

In line with this transformation, much emphasis has been placed on governance and integrity. I would particularly like to welcome my new fellow Directors onto the Board under the chairmanship of Dr Paul Davis. Through their leadership a new standard of strategic thinking about Aurum's work and future has been set. To support this, Aurum has implemented sound independent human resource, financial and information technology systems as well as audit practices to ensure the highest level of accountability for our resources and stakeholder funds.

Publication is the cornerstone of our scientific credibility and I am pleased to report that we had a number of publications in international peer-reviewed literature, made numerous presentations at international and national congresses, and submitted several grant proposals to various funders during the year. The highlight of this work was a paper in the prestigious Journal of the American Medical Association showing the remarkable effectiveness of tuberculosis (TB) preventive therapy in a routine clinical setting.

As a sign of continued support for Aurum's work, during 2005, funding inflows increased by 104% to R44 million from R21.6 million in 2004. The financial growth in 2005 was largely due to the \$14 million (equivalent to approximately R90 million in current money terms) five-year grant by the international Consortium to Respond Effectively to the AIDS/TB Epidemic (CREATE) for Aurum's Thibela TB study and an award from the US President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR). The PEPFAR award has been renewed for 2006 and Aurum's financial growth is expected to continue in 2006.

Strategically Aurum's focus has expanded beyond health issues prevailing in the South African mining industry, to the interests of the broader South African community. This change is reflected in the scope of Aurum's work described below.

Thibela TB: This large study aims to radically reduce the rates of TB among gold miners by implementing community-wide TB preventive therapy in addition to standard TB control practices. Good progress was made in preparation for the start of this study and efforts culminated in the launch of this programme both nationally and locally in October/November 2005. This was preceded by the start of pilot projects in September 2005. The project will commence recruitment in April 2006. Nested within the Thibela TB study are two important studies to determine the prevalence of latent TB infection and to improve the detection of smear negative pulmonary TB among gold miners.

HIV prevention programme: During the year, the Aurum HIV Vaccine Research and Treatment Centre was established in Klerksdorp with satellite units at the Tshepong Hospital in Juberton and at the West Vaal Hospital in Orkney. The necessary infrastructural development has been completed with the first trial scheduled to begin in April 2006. We look forward to participating in a test-of-concept HIV vaccine trial in the last quarter of 2006 and a study of acute HIV infection under the auspices of the Centre for HIV/AIDS Immunology (CHAVI). Plans are in place to establish a new HIV vaccine trial site in the Rustenburg district in the North West Province of South Africa. In addition, there are plans to participate in HIV therapeutic vaccine trials. Site preparations for microbicide trials are due to begin in the second quarter of this year in anticipation of a Phase III microbicide trial scheduled to start in mid 2007.

The **HIV treatment programme:** has grown to be the largest programme in Aurum. This division includes the work place antiretroviral therapy (ART) programme, the PEPFAR programme and operational research. The results emanating from the workplace ART programme are gratifying and are comparable to those achieved in developed countries. The PEPFAR programme has grown significantly since it started a year ago and is committed to further expanding access to HIV testing, treatment and care for indigent populations in the coming year. Operational research evaluating the HIV treatment programme has resulted in numerous presentations at international congresses and articles being published. Aurum, strategically, will continue to assume a strong leadership role in the treatment of HIV disease going forward.

The **health systems and economics programme:** is evaluating the impact of HIV/AIDS and the cost-effectiveness of ART in the workplace and community settings. This important work is unique in the Southern African setting and offers a fresh perspective over traditional actuarial services in the evaluation of disease and treatment outcomes. This strong, young team is well experienced to explore the many exciting challenges presented by the healthcare landscape in 2006.

New projects: A number of new projects are currently being considered, which include TB treatment and vaccine trials, provision of occupational health assessments for former miners and a national silicosis study.

Capacity building: In the past year, Aurum's staff complement increased from 30 to over 120 people, strengthening capacity within the company through extensive training done within the programmes or through other national or international agencies. We expect to have a staff of over 200 scientists, researchers, clinicians and support personnel by 2007. Aurum will continue to invest in training to maintain research and treatment at international standards. We encourage and train promising staff to take on more senior roles and we are committed to building on our history of developing outstanding South African scientists.

Our stakeholders: Strong, enduring partnerships, collaboration and dialogue with stakeholders are fundamental to our mission to improve health. Maintaining these important relationships and building new ones is a key focus area for all of us, at all levels of interaction with our patients, funders, clients, government agencies, corporate groups, communities, unions, universities and staff.

Funding support: Now that the Aurum Institute is independent, it is vital that we secure a sustainable stream of funding to ensure that our important research and treatment programmes can continue to benefit the communities in which we work. I am grateful to all of our funders and clients for the support and encouragement they have given us during the year.

In conclusion: Aurum is the forefront of research work and treatment programmes to make a difference to the lives of all South Africans. We have set a high standard for 2006 to meet objectives in all our endeavours. We, at Aurum are enthusiastic and committed to achieving these goals, through adherence to our core values of excellence, integrity and team work to ensure that Aurum delivers on research projects aimed at transforming health policy, both internationally and locally. My thanks are extended to the Programme Directors and the whole Aurum team for their hard work, loyalty and commitment during 2005.



Prof. Gavin Churchyard

Chief Executive