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Math prof joins HIV fight; Team hopes to develop predictive model

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A Manitoba math professor is part of a team heading to Uganda to help battle the spread of HIV and other diseases.

Abba Gumel will visit Africa next week. Working directly with other countries on diseases can benefit Canadians in many ways, said Gumel.

"What's happening elsewhere can come back and happen here, too," he said regarding the need to be prepared for things such as SARS outbreaks. Originally from Nigeria, Gumel has taught at the University of Manitoba since 1999.

He will go to Uganda as a member of the **Mathematics of Information Technology and Complex Systems** (**MITACS**), a national research group geared towards creating mathematical solutions in health, the environment and other areas.

African and Canadian scientists, health officials and others will take part in the meeting next week in Kampala, Uganda, to examine the spread of diseases.

Part of the work conducted by **MITACS** involves constructing mathematical models. The models use information -- such as who is at risk for a disease and how it's commonly transmitted -- to develop strategies to stop them from spreading, said Dr. **Arvind Gupta**, scientific director of **MITACS**.

"We have to compare with what has happened in the past to see what will happen in the future," said Gumel, adding the research can help show how to make use of limited resources to best control diseases.

The models can also provide a predictive ability, allowing officials to consider a range of options for responding to the spread of diseases, said Gupta.

The upcoming trip to Uganda will allow scientists to pool their research and ideas to learn from one another.

"The more we can do with controlling the spread of diseases, the better for the whole world," said Gupta.

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• photo by Jason Halstead, Sun Media
• Gumel poses in front of a mathematical model for the spread of HIV in a community.

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