



BIOPROSPECTING MEDIA ROUND TABLE

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Public Understanding of Biotechnology Programme

DR VINESH MAHARAJ

Dr Vinesh Maharaj is a natural product chemist and is trained in the discovery of new drug leads based on biodiversity samples. His major areas of expertise include natural products chemistry, biological evaluation of extracts in close collaboration with molecular biologists/biochemists/pharmacologists, isolation, structure elucidation of compounds and biosynthesis. Prior experience was also in natural products chemistry at CSIR, specifically on isolation, structure elucidation and biosynthesis of Mycotoxins, from 1986 until 1988. Major responsibilities include the systematic investigation of 24 000 indigenous plants as part of a 10 year project aimed at discovering drugs from South Africa's indigenous plants with a focus on HIV, malaria and TB. His current activities include scientific leadership of collaborative programmes with owners of indigenous knowledge such as Traditional Healers. He is one of the main inventors on the CSIR owned patent based on the discovery of a novel appetite suppressant for the *Hoodia* plant. Experience was gained as part of managing the South African component of the major international development program in conjunction with Phytopharm plc, Pfizer Inc and Unilever aimed at commercializing the CSIR discovery of the natural anti-obesity agent. The work included all aspects of the drug development process, excluding supervision of clinical trials. He is also part of a team of scientists at the CSIR who have discovered and commercialized a natural mosquito repellent identified from a medicinal plant. He also manages the CSIR component of the DST funded Novel Drug Discovery Platform which focuses on the discovery of novel drugs from medicinal plants for malaria, TB and diabetes. Other experience includes the establishment of essential oils and medicinal plants community based businesses, management of a GMP approved facility for the manufacture of herbal remedies. He has 14 publications and 4 patents.



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