

UWI establishes COVID-19 task force

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The University of the West Indies (UWI) has launched a task force to assist with the mobilisation of the region’s public health providers to deal with an incoming virus. Four years ago, the Zika virus triggered the response; today it is COVID-19.

The task force will be chaired by the UWI’s Professor Clive Landis, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Undergraduate Studies and former Director of the George Alleyne Chronic Disease Research Centre, who has considerable experience in the field of Caribbean public health.

The University, in a release, said it is currently delivering a software engineering degree programme at its joint Institute in Suzhou, China, and has a large registered cohort of Caribbean students.

It is engaged directly with public health officials in Suzhou, Caribbean diplomatic corps in Beijing, and the leadership of its partner university, the Global Institute for Software Engineering (GIST).

Vice-Chancellor of The UWI, Professor Sir Hilary Beckles stated, “Against the background of

dealing with its internal affairs in China, The UWI has been working in close collaboration with regional health ministries and the relevant CARICOM agencies.”

The purpose, he added, is to “Provide the necessary scientific data on the virus and to work with government colleagues in creating an effective communications strategy for the region.” He concluded by saying, “The Task Force will have a critical role to play in solutions building in the immediate future”.

Membership of the Task Force is drawn from the regional UWI medical faculties and external experts experienced in the laboratory and field deployment of an active scientific approach.

Commenting on the work of the Task Force, Professor Landis stated, “It is right that The UWI should deploy its full expertise as a public academy to help Caribbean communities cope at this instance of the COVID-19 epidemic.

The primary emphasis of the COVID-19 task force will be to provide accurate and reliable information through UWItv and other channels of communication. Armed with good information and strong partnerships we will get through this viral outbreak as we did for ‘swine flu’, Chikungunya and Zika before it.”