

## Study on hormone contraceptives, HIV wins award

### Kamcilla Pillay

DURBAN: A scientist and research fellow at a leading HIV and Aids research institution has scooped up a coveted award at the International Aids Conference.

Dr Sinaye Ngcapu, of the Centre for the Aids Programme of Research in SA (Caprisa), was awarded the Aids 2016 Women, Girls and HIV Investigator's Prize for his winning abstract titled "Effect of injectable hormonal

contraceptives on vaginal epithelium thickness and genital HIV target cell density in women recently infected with HIV".

Ngcapu's abstract was chosen from more than 6 700 entries submitted to Aids 2016. "As the first author of this abstract and a joint winner, Dr Ngcapu received the full \$2 000 (R28 000) prize," said the centre.

Ngcapu, 30, from the Eastern Cape, said he was honoured.

"I have never had the luxury of

being a full-time student, having to work to support myself through my studies and despite this I have consistently aimed for excellence under difficult conditions."

His PhD study focused on the influence of injectable hormone contraceptives' use on the risk for HIV infection and the potentially confounding effect of DMPA (also known as Depo-Provera) use in prevention research.

"Some studies have suggested that DMPA may reduce integrity

and thickness of vaginal and epithelial lining, or increase mucosal immune cells and change vaginal microbiota with impairment in hydrogen peroxide producing lactobacilli colonisation."

Lactobacilli are the organisms which reduce the pH of the vagina, making it more acidic – a hostile environment for HIV. If they do not exist in abundance, the risk increases.

In 2014, Ngcapu was awarded a Fogarty fellowship in Chicago.



SINAYE NGCAPU