

A **MATRIX** *Minute* with Leila Mansoor



About Leila

Dr. Leila Mansoor is a pharmacist by profession, Senior Scientist with the [Centre for the Aids Programme of Research in South Africa](#) (CAPRISA), and an Honorary Senior Lecturer at the [University of KwaZulu-Natal's School of Public Health](#). For MATRIX, she is the Co-Lead of [Socio-Behavioral Research in Clinical Trials](#) (Design to Delivery Hub, Pillar 2), Protocol Co-chair and Site Investigator of Record of the [MATRIX-001](#) Phase 1 study of the TAF/EVG fast-dissolving vaginal insert.

How did you begin your career in the field of HIV prevention?

In 2005 I earned my PhD in Medicines information for low-literate HIV/AIDS patients: development, evaluation and impact on adherence from Rhodes University in South Africa. The overall idea behind the program was to find out if using pictures would help with understanding the directions and in turn, enhance adherence in HIV positive patients with opportunistic infections. I joined CAPRISA in July of 2006 as a research fellow. My task was to create an adherence support program for women who enrolled into the CAPRISA 004 Tenofovir Gel Study. This ignited my passion for HIV Prevention and I went on to lead/participate in pivotal research in evaluating HIV prevention biotechnologies for young women, including work on Tenofovir Gel, Oral PrEP (Truvada), Dapivirine Vaginal Ring, long-acting Lenacapavir injectables, etc

What is your favorite part about working with MATRIX?

My favorite part about working with MATRIX is getting to work alongside Ali Minnis and her team at RTI International. Ali is a social behavioral scientist, and I am a biomedical scientist. Together we complement each other beautifully to lead the Design to Delivery Hub, Pillar 2. Working with Ali and her team has been a refreshing experience, and I have learned a ton from them.

What do you think it would take to end the HIV epidemic?

We have come a long way in both HIV treatment and prevention. We've found ways to combine multiple drugs into just one pill, as well as long-acting drugs for treatment, and we have expanded our HIV prevention toolbox with oral PrEP the dapivirine vaginal ring and CAB-LA. While we have made great progress, we have a long way to go in the fight against HIV. We need a lot more options and choices, and that's where MATRIX comes in. We also need to figure out the best way to get these methods to the people who need it, and to support adherence of these drugs. There is still a lot to do before we can say that we are close to ending the HIV epidemic

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What advice would you give to someone looking to work in the field of preventative technologies?

This field is very exciting to be in and it can be very rewarding, but it does require a lot of hard work and effort. If you're looking for instant gratification, then this field is not for you. There's a lot of waiting to see if the work you put in will pay out, and it can be very frustrating at times. Despite all the potential challenges and difficulties however, I have not once regretted my decision to stay in HIV prevention research. In my over 17 years of working in this field, I've yet to have a single boring day.

What career path would you have taken if HIV didn't exist?

I can almost say for certain that I would have been in some place that promotes women's empowerment, which is a field that I feel very passionate about. We have not done well with this generally, not just in the health arena. The world has not changed much in the sense of men being recognized as being superior to women. They are recognized as the decision makers when it comes to sex and using condoms, or just anything generally. If I didn't enter the research field I would have been somewhere hoping to empower women, especially the younger generation.

Do you have any heroes?

Throughout my life's journey I've had people who have had a massive influence on me. My paternal grandfather for example - who is nearly 96 years old and still going strong. He started off his life from humble beginnings, and he developed into a well-known businessman who was able to take care of his entire family. He taught me that you shouldn't be afraid of hard work, and that in life you need to be resilient and persevere to meet your dreams. Another person who made a huge impact in my life was my PhD supervisor, Professor Ros Dowse. She taught me scientific thinking along with scientific rigor, and she was the one who exposed me to research. I also can't forget Professors Salim and Quarraisha Abdool Karim, as they granted me amazing opportunities to grow and pushed me into becoming an independent scientist

What might others would be surprised to know about you?

To quote Tom Cruise from Top Gun "*I feel the need, the need for speed*". I am actually a bit of an adrenaline Junky! I love fast cars - also paragliding, jet skiing, parasailing - anything that gives me a bit of an adrenaline rush

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