

NWU academic and Fulbright Fellowship holder doing ground-breaking cancer research

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North-West University (NWU) academic in the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences, Prof Mulunda Mwanza, has been selected and awarded the prestigious Fulbright Visiting Scholar Fellowship, and is currently based at the University of Missouri (USA).

He is working with Prof Yves Chabu – one of the world's leading researchers on cancer – in Prof Chabu's Cancer Advanced Research Laboratory.

Prof Mwanza is doing research on mycotoxins and its impact on health. He is currently working on the possible aflatoxins mechanistic involved in promoting breast cancer, and is researching possible interventions for early detection and control. His study is titled "Exploring a link between mycotoxins and breast cancer".

Prof Mwanza says aflatoxins have been associated with liver cancer, immune suppression and growth retardation in children. "Breast cancer is on the rise among women. Countries such as Senegal, Kenya, Gambia, and South Africa have seen the increase in the number of people with both liver and breast cancer.

"Preliminary data obtained on bovine have revealed that there is a correlation between mastitis occurrence and aflatoxin M1 excretion in milk. In addition, studies done among breastfeeding women around the world and particularly in the North West province in South Africa – in collaboration with the NWU's School of Nursing – showed that aflatoxins and particularly aflatoxin M1 are excreted in the milk," adds Prof Mwanza.

"Our hypothesis is that breastfeeding mothers and all other women store these mycotoxins in their breasts. Since the milk is stored in the breast's alveoli, there is a probable immune modulation of the cells due to the effects of aflatoxins and particularly of AFB1. There is a probable correlation between the occurrences of breast cancer with the occurrence of aflatoxin M1 in milk," concludes Prof Mwanza.



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