

THE ART OF RESEARCH



Finding local solutions to understand bacterial vaginosis better

Studying local strains of *Gardnerella* may help more people resolve bacterial vaginosis in the long term.

Hannah Livingstone is an honours student at the University of Cape Town, focusing on the vaginal microbiota and bacterial vaginosis.

ORCID ID:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4804-7425>

Women in sub-Saharan Africa are disproportionately affected by bacterial vaginosis (BV). BV is still not completely understood, but can be described as a shift away from the normal, healthy community of bacteria living in the vaginal environment.

Along with increasing the risk of negative health outcomes such as preterm birth and pelvic inflammatory disease, BV increases the risk of acquiring HIV.

The condition is characterised by

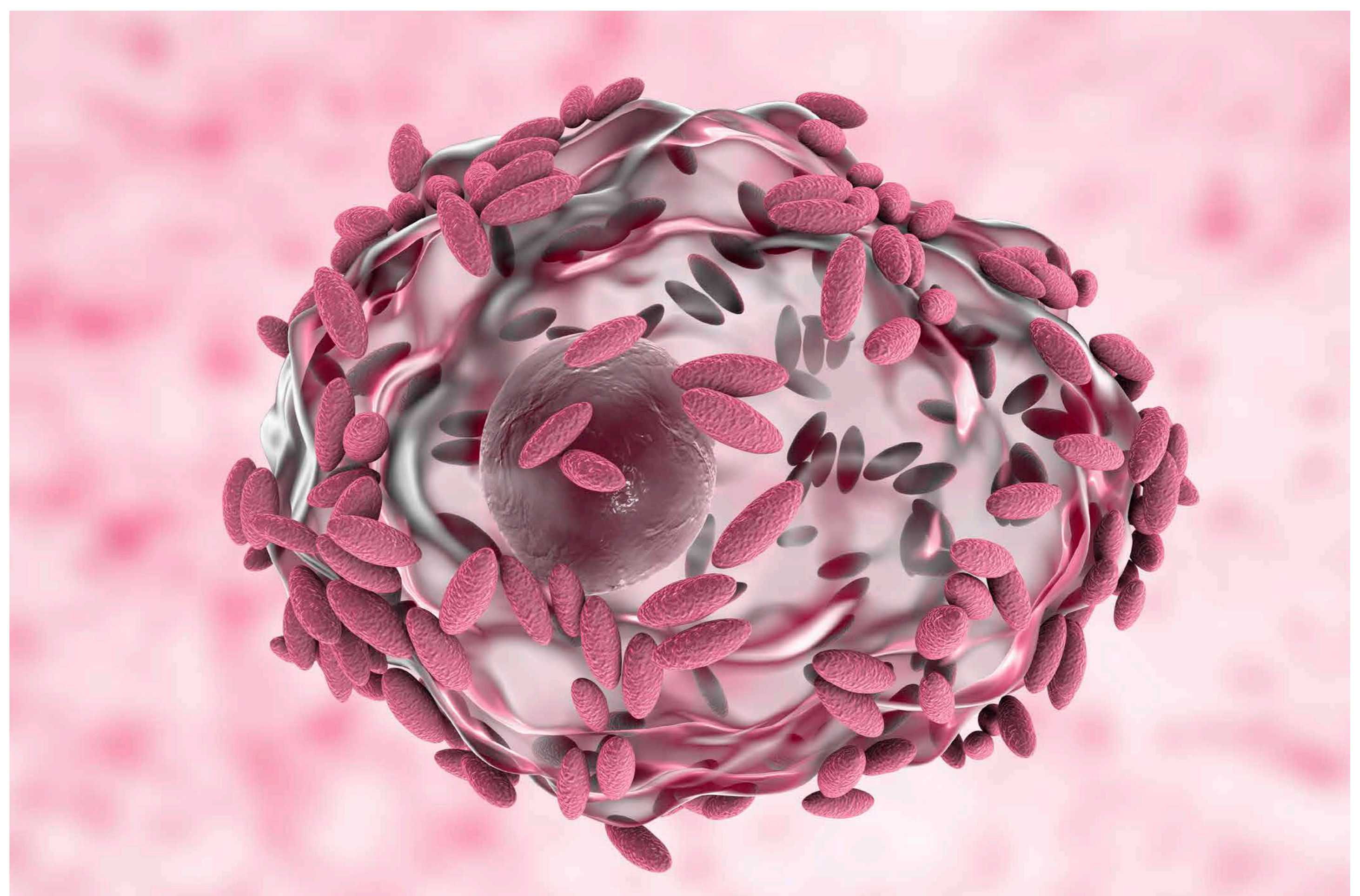
vaginal discharge and a fishy odour, which may lead to those who develop it feeling insecure or embarrassed to seek treatment.

“Research has indicated that many people who develop BV fail to reach long-term cure, with half of them seeing the condition reappear within a year,” says Hannah Livingstone.

The cause of BV is not completely understood, but several bacteria are known to play a key role, with *Gardnerella vaginalis* being one of these bacteria.

“My research focuses on creating a collection of *Gardnerella* strains which come from South African women, and investigating how they differ from international strains.”

Understanding how these strains may be different from international strains and having a collection of strains ready to be used by other researchers will aid in allowing us to understand BV better, to reduce its negative impact and hopefully to help more people resolve BV in the long term.



Presented in association with the Institute of Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine, this programme forms part of #theArtofResearch, an initiative of research communication specialists Jive Media Africa.



Comparing local strains of *Gardnerella vaginalis* with international strains might help find a cure for bacterial vaginosis.

