



FACULTY NEWS

Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Cape Town
First Quarter 2015



Life-like dolls mimic human reactions to medication and trauma in clinical training p. 6

Welcome to the first 2015 edition of our Faculty newsletter. We started the year with a new (but familiar) face at the helm of Faculty leadership, Prof Gregory Hussey, and wish him well during his tenure as Interim Dean of the most active and complex Faculty at UCT. We also send best wishes to former Dean Prof Wim de Villiers as he takes up his new post as Rector and Vice-Chancellor of Stellenbosch University in April.

Prof Hussey, who has 'hit the deck running', will continue steering the Faculty in the implementation of the FHS Strategy, Vision 2030.

The successful implementation of the strategy will see the Faculty reposition itself as a centre of health excellence on the continent, synonymous with research and teaching innovation, impacting the health of the continent and strengthening its partnerships and collaborations across the continent and beyond. The full strategy is available on the website under "[Mission & Vision](#)".

The first few months of 2015 have been exceptionally busy, and campus has been abuzz with eager first years, returning and new

students having to settle in very quickly to the demands of their health sciences programmes. Well done to all staff involved in the smooth co-ordination of this.

Our staff continues to ride the waves of acknowledgement that keep coming our way - reaping the fruit of years of commitment to their trade with recognition awards and opportunities to make greater contributions. Congratulations! We report also on a number of activities and initiatives on campus, which illustrate the infectious dynamism, and culture of passion in our Faculty community.

Last but not least, like the rest of UCT, the topic on everyone's lips is the current conversation around the "Rhodes must fall" activism, our institutional symbolism and culture, and how this is articulating for radical transformation at UCT. On page two, we publish our Faculty leadership's statement on the matter, and how it intends taking the debate forward with its constituents. Please continue sending us your exciting news. Enjoy the read, and feel free to send us feedback so that we can improve future editions.

The Editorial team

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Professor Robert Wilkinson awarded NRF A1 rating



“Rhodes must fall”

Statement by the Faculty of Health Sciences’ leadership

The leadership of the Faculty of Health Sciences, comprising the Deanery and Heads of Department, hereby states its position on the current ‘Rhodes must fall’ campaign, which has sparked unprecedented debate and activism at UCT on a scale not seen since the advent of democracy twenty one years ago.

We acknowledge the pain and anger evoked by the symbolism not only of the Rhodes statue, but other symbols and names that celebrate colonialism and apartheid.

We understand that the call for the removal of the Rhodes statue is symbolic of a deeper issue, namely, the lack of transformation at UCT. We recognize that it is indicative of our failure as a nation to achieve true democracy thereby translating into the alienation experienced by black students and staff at UCT. We are encouraged by the students’ and staff expressions and their call to action for the University to accelerate transformation on all fronts.

We believe that the University’s and specifically our Faculty’s student body and staff complement must more closely reflect the demographics of the population of our country. Our curriculum and research must address our collective heritage, environment and developmental needs. Our institutional culture must celebrate our rich history, diversity and talent in an affirming and inclusive manner, so as to accord the dignity and respect to black staff and students as we continue to build a non-racial democracy.

We recognise that our Faculty has been slow in implementing transformation, as articulated in the Faculty Charter we adopted on 9 May 2002.

We acknowledge that we have not fully embraced the definition of transformation adopted by our Faculty in the year 2000, as *“a process of negotiated organisational change that breaks decisively with the past discriminatory practices in order to create an environment where the full potential of everyone is realised and where diversity, both social and intellectual is respected and valued and where it is central to the achievement of the Faculty’s goals”*.

We support constructive engagement with all

constituencies of the UCT community to develop and implement interventions to fast-track transformation.

To this end, we:

- Support the UCT Senior Leadership’s commitment to move the Rhodes statue as soon as possible, and to embark on an all-inclusive process to address transformation;
- Believe that this presents UCT and our Faculty with the opportunity to accelerate the process of re-engineering itself as fully responsive to its environment, to effect genuine transformation;
- Will meaningfully engage with our students and staff on transformation in the Faculty, with a view to implementing concrete interventions to fast-track transformation, predicated on a recommitment to the principles of our Faculty Charter (see attached).

In order to facilitate this process, we will be hosting a Faculty wide assembly to give students and staff the space and opportunity to voice their opinions and to make recommendations on how we as a Faculty should move forward to ensure that we do so in a meaningful, inclusive and constructive way.

When engaging on the topic of this campaign, we call on all staff and students to:

- Do so in a professional and responsible manner;
- Undertake to refrain from actions and words that may be perceived as being sexist, racist and homophobic; and
- To embrace the principle of reconciliation that was bequeathed to us by Madiba.

Let us recommit ourselves, in honour of the Madiba’s legacy, to building a strong Faculty that is committed to transformation and equity and reflects the diversity of our country and thereby making staff and students proud of their association with this institution.

Interim Dean Professor Gregory Hussey on behalf of the Faculty leadership



With forty years of experience and strong roots in the Faculty of Health Sciences, Professor Gregory Hussey was well poised to take the helm as Interim Dean on the 1st of January. He had no qualms about accepting the position.

“I saw it as a challenge and I felt that, the fact that I’d worked in a number of different capacities in the Faculty over the last twenty years, I knew I could do the job,” he says.

A cursory glance at his extensive career reveals why he is the perfect person for the task. His journey to becoming a globally recognised leader and expert in the field of vaccinology began when he obtained both his undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications at UCT. He then went on to be a joint staff member in paediatrics, a public health consultant and established the Paediatric Infectious Diseases Unit at the Red Cross War Memorial Children’s Hospital.

Counted among his many remarkable achievements is the founding of the South African Tuberculosis Vaccine Initiative (SATVI) – SATVI is now the leading TB Vaccine research group in the world; he was instrumental in motivating for and subsequently taking charge of the Institute of Infectious Diseases of Molecular Medicine as Director for four years; establishing the Vaccines for Africa (VACFA) advocacy initiative; and more recently the UCT Clinical Research Centre. New Initiatives he will be throwing his weight behind are the recently launched Neurosciences Initiative and the Cancer Research Centre.

Prof Hussey can aptly be described as an enterprising academic. Attracting half a billion rand in capital to UCT over twenty years is a testament to his dexterity in creating new ventures and sourcing funding for research, academic development, capacity building and activities related to academic enterprise.

It is this visionary aptitude that Prof Hussey brings to his new role as Interim Dean. The driving force behind the FHS Strategic Plan, Prof Hussey has a clear idea of where the Faculty should be in the next 30 years and hopes to use his



tenure to ensure it remains on an even keel while seizing opportunities to move ahead.

“I believe ‘we can do, and will do’,” he says with determination.

In addition to continuing projects initiated by his predecessors, Emeritus Professor Marian Jacobs and Professor Wim de Villiers, Prof Hussey intends to prompt the streamlining of administrative processes for greater efficiency.

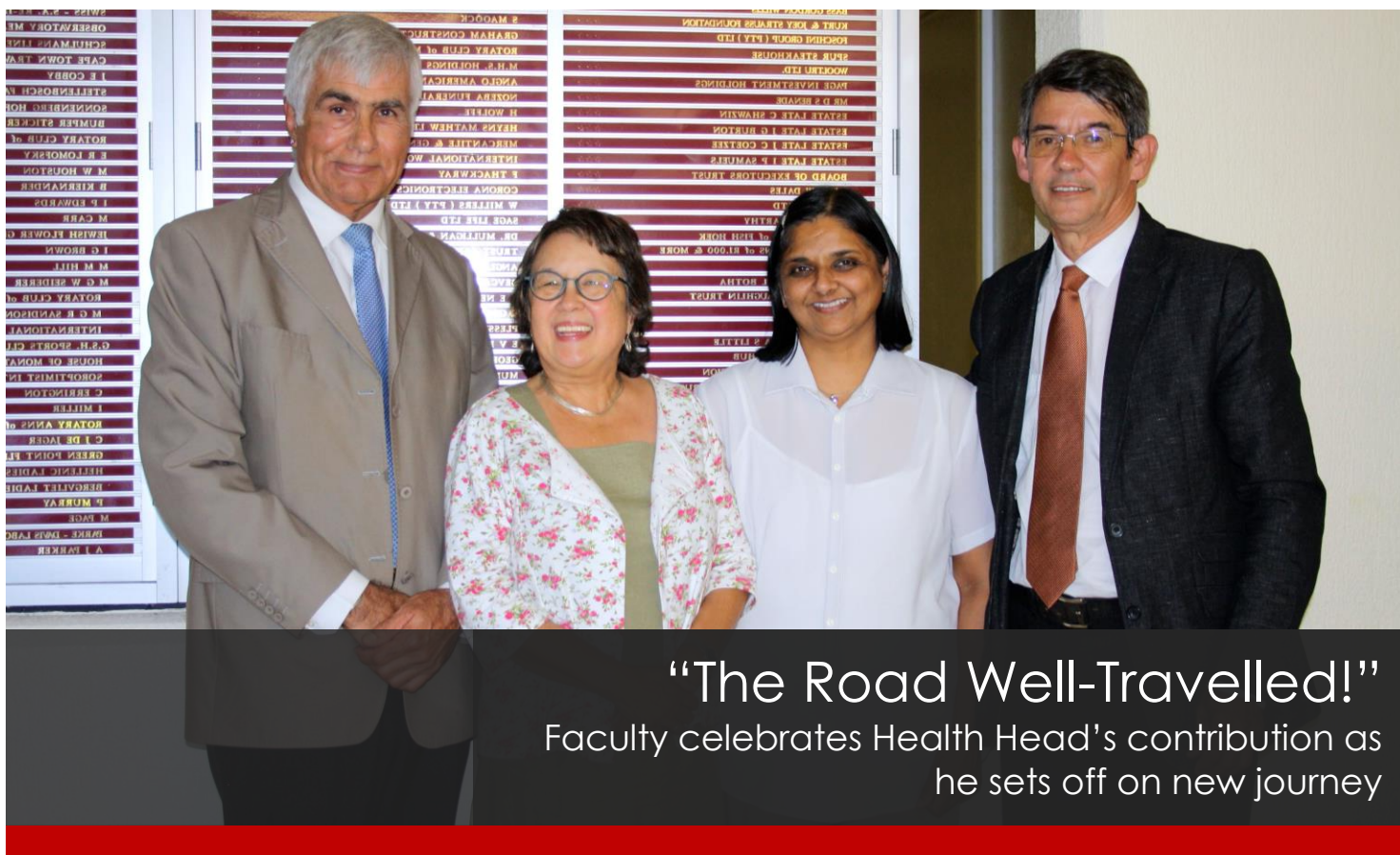
“I see it [being Interim Dean] as more than just holding the fort, I see it as advancing the agenda.”

High on his agenda is the enhancement of student experiences, as well as the improvement of support for Faculty and joint staff. Prof Hussey is committed to generating a value system that is not only about giving rewards and recognition but also genuine institutional transformation, a matter that has always been close to his heart, citing the Faculty Transformation Committee that must give effect to this in the Faculty. Included in this is the cultivation of cultural values that ensure work is done, and that the Faculty is responsive to both society and the university community.

And how does he intend to do this? Through inclusive and decisive leadership, is his answer.

“I’m definitely not a corporate ‘psychopath’ - I’m more a democratic, participatory type of person. I believe that it’s not about as the saying goes “the vote, but it’s about having a say”. It’s about giving people the space to talk, to make decisions that are in the interest of the organisation.”

It is early in his tenure, but Prof Hussey says the experience has been overwhelmingly positive. Prof Hussey has approached his new role fervently, making time to engage with the different constituents of the Faculty. He is eager to continue doing so and to create ways to support some of the bright ideas he has encountered in this brief time. He asserts that the job has certainly been made easier through the support of the deanery and everyone across the Faculty.



“The Road Well-Travelled!” Faculty celebrates Health Head’s contribution as he sets off on new journey

Left to Right: Prof Craig Househam, Emeritus Prof Marian Jacobs, Dr Bhavna Patel and Prof Gregory Hussey

While retirement at the pinnacle of one’s career could seem a misfortune, it brings pleasure in that, unrestrained by the administrative tasks of working life, more time is left to enjoy one’s passions and leisurely activities.

This was the message delivered by Emeritus Professor Marian Jacobs to outgoing Head of the Western Cape Health Department, Professor Craig Househam on 22 January 2015. To mark his retirement in March, the Department of Medicine, Groote Schuur Hospital and the UCT Faculty of Health Sciences, invited him to speak at the first Thursday Forum of the year. Presenting a Valedictory Lecture entitled “The Road Well-Travelled!” Professor Househam spoke fondly of his illustrious 40-year career in public service, medicine, academia and management.

With a healthy dose of humour he took attendants on a journey through aspects of his personal and public life. From the highs of working in the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health at the University of the Free State, to the troublesome period of AIDS denialism, the Professor spoke candidly about his experiences.

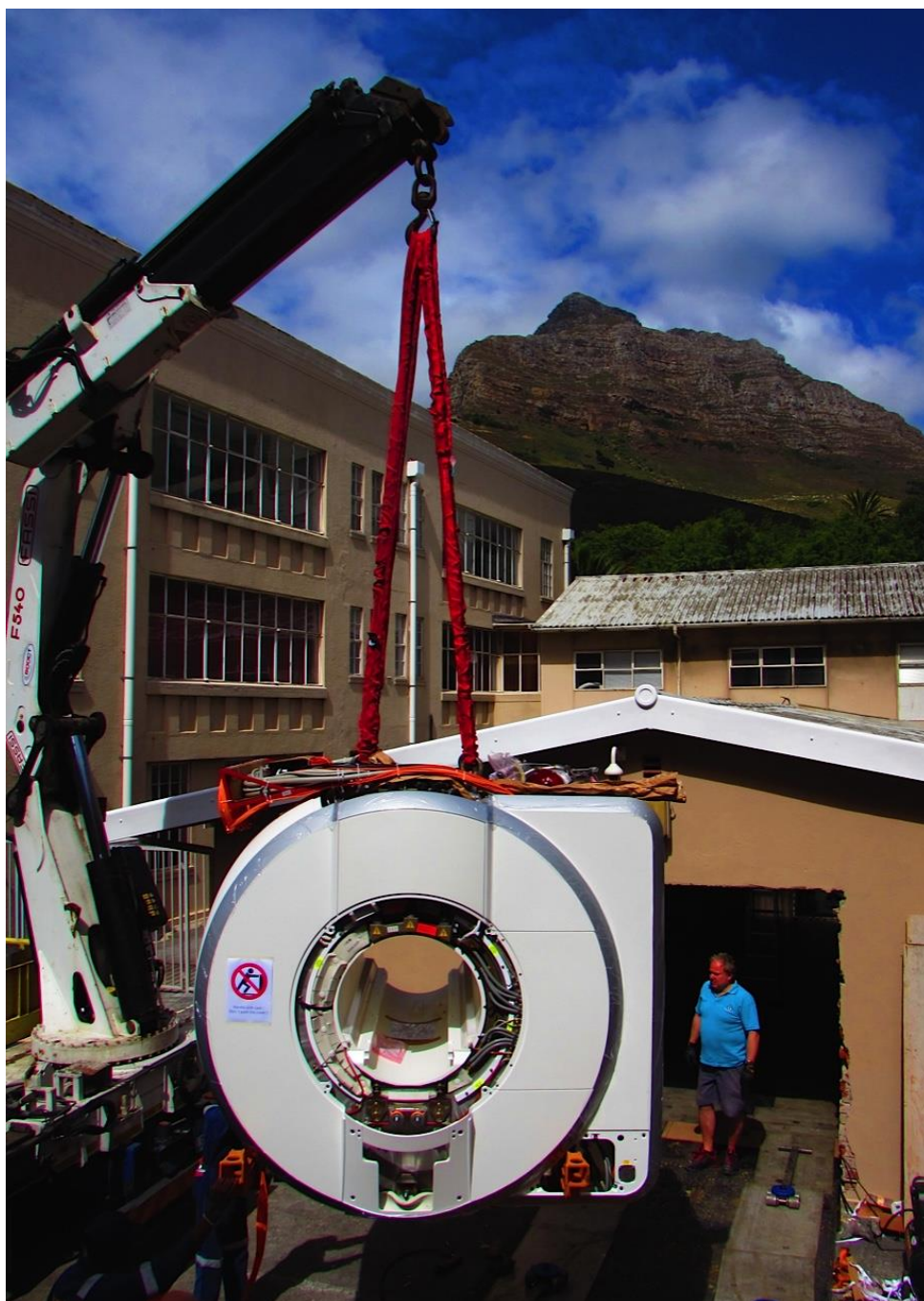
He imparted the most important lessons learnt as a manager in health services: simplicity, tight fiscal control, effective communication and shrewd management of the interface

between the political office-bearer and the department. Looking to the future, Professor Househam expressed hope in the present cohort of young doctors working in the Western Cape. He said he was heartened that young doctors are positive about the future, and their practice in South Africa.

Touching on the Healthcare 2030 strategy, he remarked that it provided a stepwise approach to address not only the structural issues but also the softer issues of people and systems. He added that the greatest challenge to the province was the increasing pressure on a health system that lacked the financial resources to match growing patient numbers.

He encouraged all those who hold health and healthcare dear to stand together to ensure that policymakers are aware of the challenges and to ensure that every resource allocated to health is utilised to the best possible effect.

In closing he said that while he would certainly miss his daily challenge of health care management, he was optimistic about the next phase of his life, on a personal level, and for this great and wonderful country in which we live and work. Professor Househam will retire on the 31st of March 2015 after which, his deputy, Dr Beth Engelbrecht will take over his post.



Valentines delivery a labour of love

Africa's first full body high-field Magnetic Resonance Imagine (MRI) scanner is delivered.

“This state-of-the-art machine ushers in a new era of imaging research, including cardiac, abdominal and muscoskeletal.”

Head of CUBIC-UCT Prof Ernesta Meintjes

The delivery of Africa's first full-body high-field Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scanner, on Valentine's Day 14 February 2015, at the new Cape Universities Body Imaging Centre site (CUBIC-UCT) on the premises of Groote Schuur Hospital, can best be described as the product of a labour of love.

A multi-disciplinary team led by Professor Bongani Mayosi, Head of the Department of Medicine at UCT and Groote Schuur Hospital, and Professor

Ernesta Meintjes, of the MRC/UCT Medical Imaging Research Unit, fundraised over four years to secure funds from the Technology Innovation Agency, the National Research Foundation, and the Cancer Research Trust.

The result is the Siemens Skyra, which is valued at R24 million.

CUBIC is a national imaging facility established through collaboration between the University of Cape Town,

Stellenbosch University, the Medical Research Council and Siemens.

The new site, adjacent to the Psychiatry block at Groote Schuur Hospital, is an extension of the original facility located at Tygerberg Hospital where a brain-only research MRI scanner has been operational since January 2007.

This Faculty core facility opened for scanning on 23 March 2015.

Real-life dolls train in Clinical Skills



On the 21st of February 2015, the UCT Clinical Skills Centre and Dräger Medical South Africa (PTY) Ltd celebrated a unique partnership with the launch of the newly-renovated Simulation Laboratory in the Old Main Building in Groote Schuur Hospital.

Furnished with state-of the art medical equipment, the laboratory provides opportunities for students to gain technical competency in procedural skills before they reach the patient, and allows teams to practice communication skills and protocols for crisis situations, such as resuscitations.

Speaking at the launch, Director of the Centre Dr Rachel Weiss said that not only did simulation-based education

have the potential to improve patients' experience, care and save lives; it is also ethically and pedagogically sound. Simulation pedagogy includes peer feedback and structured debriefing, which is not always feasible in busy hospital wards, clinics and operating theatres.

Students reap the benefits of real time instruction; avoid causing trauma to patients; attempt procedures they would not ordinarily try; work across discipline levels of training and familiarise themselves with clinical equipment. Invited guests saw this in action in each of the five simulation rooms where students and staff demonstrated practical case-based scenarios. The demonstrations showcased the realism of the simulations complete with life-like dolls that mimic human reactions to medication and trauma.

Fourth year medical student Tendai Ponde, a participant in the trauma simulation, expressed the benefits of this type of learning. **"Using the mannequins gives you a good feel of muscle memory, and it makes you confident in what you need to do. You'll find that your hands are in the right place because you're used to practicing...and the jump between reality and practice becomes really small. So it makes it easy to know what to do and a lot less harder to panic".**

This unique setting presents an opportunity to build a library of scenarios that are African focused as the data from the mannequins is recorded and utilised as training material. Mr Michael Karsta, President of Middle East Africa Dräger Dubai, reiterated this saying that the "fruitful partnership...will allow for the transfer of skills and a view of the much needed knowledge of African challenges". The Simulation Laboratory is truly a space in which technology and education converge to develop well trained persons needed to protect and save lives.



Major Neurosciences Initiative launched

Hub for all neuro-disciplines planned for Groote Schuur hospital in Cape Town

J Block at Groote Schuur Hospital, where the Neurosciences Initiative will be headquartered

The successful non-invasive removal via his eyebrow of a brain tumour the size of a tennis ball restored his eyesight and life, and was what inspired UCT alumnus, David Barnes and his wife Ursel, to donate R25 million to the establishment of Africa's first Neurosciences Initiative. This donation, along with fundraising efforts to finance the development of a state-of-the-art facility, will realise a 6-year vision of Prof Graham Fieggen and colleagues to advance care and transform research and teaching in the neurosciences in Africa.

Launched in partnership with Groote Schuur Hospital (GSH) on 23 March, the Neurosciences Initiative will bring together clinicians and researchers from a wide range of specialties, fostering collaboration in the treatment of a number of neurological disorders, including stroke, central nervous system infection and trauma, among others.

"We envisage a state-of-the-art facility with an array of expertise in neurosurgery, neurology, neuropsychology, neuropsychiatry and neuroimaging," said Prof Fieggen, Head of the Division of Neurosurgery. It will also partner with other disciplines such as engineering, the arts and disability studies, creating a facility where patients can access the highest quality of care and the most cutting-edge treatment options.

"Neurosciences is the new frontier of medical research at UCT," said Interim Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences, Prof Gregory Hussey. "Through this initiative, we aim to make a contribution not only in South Africa, but in Africa and globally. The Initiative will address the needs of our continent's people and open new ways for Africa to contribute to the global body of knowledge in this rapidly advancing field."

Prof Graham Fieggen added, **"The majority of people suffering from common neurological disorders live in low and middle-income countries. There is a need to understand these disorders within the context of our own continent. We cannot simply import models from the Global North."**

"This was our way of giving back to medical research, so that others may benefit," said Mr Barnes at an informal event held at

the undeveloped site to thank him and Ursul for their generous contribution. He said that he would like to stand on the same spot in five years time to assess progress of the project. A projected further R25m rand is still needed to realise this, and the Faculty will embark on an intensive campaign to raise the money.

The official launch of the Neurosciences Initiative was hosted by UCT Vice-Chancellor Dr Max Price and attended by the University of Oxford Vice-Chancellor Professor Andrew Hamilton, and a delegation of leading researchers from both universities. UCT researchers have been meeting with their University of Oxford counterparts in Cape Town to discuss a range of collaborations that could make valuable inroads in research from neurosciences and malaria, to land reform and HIV.

The Neurosciences Initiative will be housed in the J-Block at Groote Schuur hospital. The facility will be developed to include the academic departments of key neuroscience disciplines, laboratories, a neuroimaging facility and highly specialised, multidisciplinary clinics, which will complement and enhance the existing clinical activities at Groote Schuur hospital.



Alumnus David and his wife Ursel Barnes, who donated the initial R25 million for the Neurosciences Initiative

Neglect exacerbating rheumatic heart disease

By UCT News



Professor Bongani Mayosi

Primary healthcare systems in many low and middle-income countries are not prioritising simple, effective measures to treat rheumatic heart disease, a preventable disease, says a new study lead by UCT's Professor Bongani Mayosi and published in the European Heart Journal.

A common disease in Africa and other poor regions, rheumatic heart disease is being neglected by health ministries and by the international community in general, says Mayosi. Head of UCT's Department of Medicine and Groote Schuur Hospital, Mayosi lead the research on the Global Rheumatic Heart Disease Registry, known as the REMEDY study. "Our findings reflect the utter neglect of rheumatic heart disease in affected countries," he said.

Rheumatic fever triggers

Rheumatic heart disease is triggered by rheumatic fever, which is preceded by a group A streptococcal throat infection. It kills up to 1.4 million people a year, mainly in low- and middle-income countries where overcrowding, limited access to healthcare and poor housing and nutrition are exacerbating factors.

It affects the heart, joints and central nervous system. Untreated, it can cause scarring (fibrosis) of the heart valves, requiring expensive and inaccessible valve replacement or repair work. It can also cause an irregular heartbeat, heart failure and death.

However its treatment relies on simple measures. Regular antibiotics prevent rheumatic fever recurring and can stop the condition worsening in those with the disease, while oral anti-coagulants can help prevent strokes in patients with rheumatic heart disease and atrial fibrillation.

Antibiotics and contraception vital

The pilot phase of the REMEDY study, undertaken between 2010 and 2012, surveyed 3 343 rheumatic heart disease patients attending one of 25 hospitals in 12 African countries, or in Yemen and India. It found that the majority of rheumatic heart disease patients were young (median age of 28), mainly female (66%) and unemployed (77%).

Results showed that:

only 55% of rheumatic heart disease patients were receiving antibiotics;

oral anti-coagulants were prescribed in 70% of patients – but less than one-third received this medication at the right therapeutic level;

20% of pregnant patients were on the anti-coagulant warfarin, despite its damaging effects on foetuses;

among the 1 825 women of child-bearing age only 4% were taking contraceptive measures, in spite of rheumatic heart disease increasing the risks during pregnancy and at birth. The disease is a major non-obstetric cause of maternal death in Africa.

Study a baseline for intervention

Study co-author Professor Salim Yusuf, executive director at the Population Health Research Institute, McMaster University, Canada, and incoming president of the World Heart Federation, said the World Health Organisation had called for a 25% reduction of mortality associated with rheumatic heart disease and other non-communicable disease by the year 2025.

This is known as the 25x25 target.

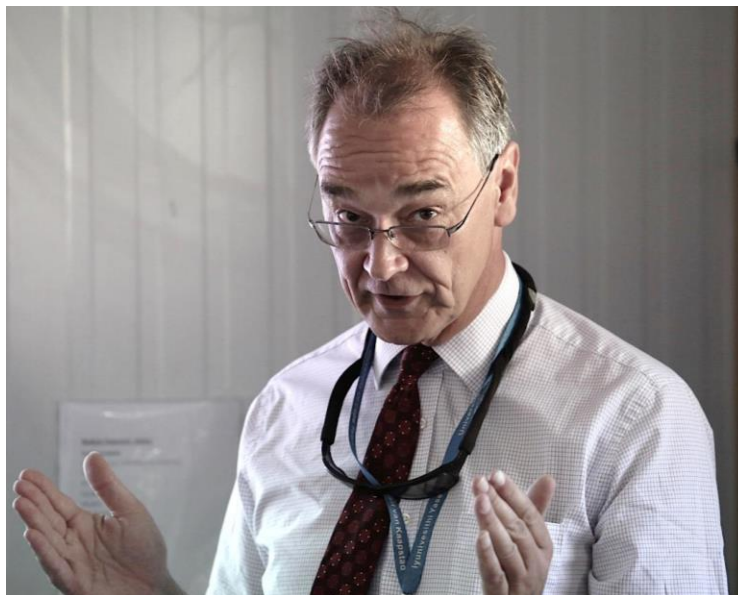
"The finding of this study not only set the baseline by which to judge progress but point to the need to close the gap in the use of evidence-based interventions if the 25x25 target is to be achieved," Yusuf added.

Mayosi said a full study of 30 000 patients with rheumatic heart disease would be launched in 166 endemic countries in 2015. "The full REMEDY study, which will involve contributors from across the world, will serve as a platform for monitoring progress towards the 25x25 target and also trialing new and novel strategies, such as new oral anti-coagulants.

"By applying preventive measures, REMEDY seeks to end rheumatic heart disease in our own lifetime."

Image by Michael Hammond

IDM Prof Wilkinson's
A1 rating
- country's highest
acknowledgement of a
researcher



“Robert's ability to identify and nurture scientific talent is quite remarkable, as evidenced by his outstanding track record of producing professors!”
Prof Valerie Mizrahi, IDM Director

Colleagues and students in the Faculty of Health Sciences were recently thrilled by the news that Professor Robert J Wilkinson, Director of the Clinical Infectious Disease Research Initiative (CIDRI), Full Member of the Institute for Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine (IDM) and Honorary Professor in the Department of Medicine, had been awarded an A1 rating – the highest – by the National Research Foundation (NRF).

The NRF grants an A1 rating to a researcher who is “recognised by all reviewers as a leading scholar in his/her field internationally for the high quality and wide impact (i.e. beyond a narrow field of specialisation) of his/her recent outputs”. An A1 rating is thus a rare honour, reserved for the most distinguished researchers.

Within the Faculty Prof Wilkinson is one of four A1 rated researchers; is one of 13 A1 rated scientists at UCT, and is among 30 A1 rated researchers in South Africa.

“I'm honoured to gain South African national recognition, and never knew there were so few such researchers so recognised,”
was the reaction of Prof Wilkinson.

“We are delighted at the news,” says Interim Dean Professor Gregory Hussey. “Robert deserves this acknowledgement. I want to thank him for the significant

contribution he has made to the Faculty over the past 10 - 15 years, adding exceptional value to the Faculty, particularly in developments at the IDM, where he was a founder member, explains Prof Hussey.

IDM Director Prof Valerie Mizrahi says Prof Wilkinson has profoundly influenced strategic thinking for many years as a member of the Institute's Executive Committee, and currently, as a member of the IDM Management Board. On a personal level, she partly attributes her relocation from Gauteng to UCT in 2011 to Prof Wilkinson for his support in refurbishing a laboratory in the IDM to accommodate her group's TB research programme at UCT.

Prof Wilkinson joined UCT in 2004 as an Honorary Associate Professor from Imperial College in the UK, became Honorary Professor in 2007, and then Director of CIDRI in 2008. He is a Wellcome Trust Senior Fellow in Clinical Science, an MRC Programme Leader at the National Institute for Medical Research London and a Professor in Infectious Diseases at Imperial College London. His major research interest is understanding and intervening in tuberculosis and HIV-associated tuberculosis. He typically underplays his role at the IDM. When

asked about his experience of his time at UCT, he says, “I believe that the IDM has fostered critical mass to become the best environment to research tuberculosis in the world”.

As Principal Investigator of a strategic award from the Wellcome Trust, Prof Wilkinson set up CIDRI to develop human and physical research capacity and promote scientific collaboration in Southern Africa, focusing on high-burden infectious diseases relevant to the African continent.

“CIDRI is now a model for research capacity development in the Faculty,” says Prof Mizrahi.

Colleague (and former student) Prof Graeme Meintjes credits Prof Wilkinson with leading the development of an integrated TB research platform in Cape Town that spans from the high burden clinical setting in Khayelitsha to state-of-the art laboratory investigation at UCT over the past 10 years.

“Robert's work linking the clinical with fundamental research regarding the TB bacteria and the human immune response to TB is internationally recognised,” he says.

Cont'd on p 10

Prof Wilkinson continued from p 9

The research has broken new ground in understanding the spectrum of how the immune system controls or fails to control TB, how HIV, ARVs and vitamin D impacts this, and how the immune system sometimes contributes to the TB disease process through excessive inflammation. His research has also tested new strategies for preventing TB and findings have influenced international guidelines.

The impact of Prof Wilkinson's contribution to income generation in the Faculty is also particularly impressive.

"Among colleagues there is profound appreciation of the significant funding Rob has generated for research capacity development, and for the Faculty," says Prof Hussey. In the process, many entry-level South African researchers have been given the opportunity to be trained and obtain postgraduate degrees working within a research team that has an international impact.

His contribution to nurturing the new generation of clinician scientist, not only in South Africa, but beyond, is best summed up by Prof Val Mizrahi's observation that "Robert's ability to identify and nurture scientific talent is quite remarkable, as evidenced by his outstanding track record of producing professors!" Prof Meintjes is one such bright young researcher developing a name for himself in HIV research under the guidance of Prof Wilkinson.

"He challenges those whom he supervises to think out of the box when defining their research questions, and aim high in terms of the scientific and health impacts of the research to be conducted," says Prof Meintjes of his colleague.

Wilkinson travels extensively across the world - around 300 000 kilometers per year within Africa, and to Europe and North America - as a fundraiser, speaker and to further collaboration.

The NRF award, he says, could not have been achieved without the dedication of a team of over 50 people. He mentions specifically the help of Rob Morrell and Yolande Harley with respect to the application to the NRF. Then last but not least, the support of his family, his wife Katalin who also works in the same area, and his two boys, Bertie (13) and Johnny (8). And, besides enjoying cooking and the outdoors with his family, how does this man with his unrelenting schedule pass his spare time, we ask?

"I stare out of aeroplane windows, preferably from the sharp end", he says cheekily with the dry wit he is known for.

But it is all seriousness when he confirms that his personal goal is to make a contribution to reduce the incidence of tuberculosis in southern Africa – epitomising the strong passion that has catapulted him as one of the top rated researchers in the country.

Kudos

Professor Lynette Denny to receive prestigious FIGO Award

Professor Lynette Denny has been successfully nominated for the International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) Award. Since 1997, FIGO has recognised women obstetricians and gynaecologists who have made a special contribution to science and scientific research in the field and who, throughout their career, have been dedicated to the improvement of healthcare for women, mothers and their children. Prof Denny will receive the award at the XXI FIGO World Congress in Vancouver, Canada.

President of Convocation Medal (2014) awarded to Professor William Pick

Honorary Professor William Pick of Public and Family Health was awarded the President of Convocation Medal (2014) at the graduation ceremony held on 16 December 2014. In her citation, President of

Convocation Mary Burton lauded Prof Pick, a UCT medical graduate and previous HOD of Community Health at Wits, for his distinguished leadership in public health and whose life and work has been devoted to improving healthcare for all South Africans.

PhD Student selected to participate in Nobel Laureate Meeting

Zela Martin, PhD candidate in the Institute of Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine (IDM) has been selected to participate in the 65th Lindau Nobel Laureate Meeting, to be held from 28 June to 3 July 2015, in Lindau, Germany. This prestigious event is open to the most qualified young scientists who are given the opportunity to enrich and share the unique atmosphere of the Lindau Nobel Laureate Meetings.

Dr Tolu Oni awarded Next Einstein Fellowship of outstanding thinkers

Dr Tolu Oni, Senior Lecturer in Public Health Medicine has been selected as one of the Next Einstein Forum (NEF) Fellow for the class of 2015. The NEF Fellowship is a flagship program of the Next Einstein Forum (NEF). The NEF unites more than 500 outstanding thinkers and distinguished stakeholders from around the world together in Africa. NEF global gatherings, held every second year, will showcase 15 of Africa's top young scientists and connect them with leaders from Africa and the rest of the world in high-profile forums. These leading scientists, policy-makers, business people, journalists, civil-society representatives and entrepreneurs will highlight breakthrough discoveries and catalyse scientific collaboration for human development.

FHS welcomes 11th SARChI chair



Associate Professor Aqiel Dalvie

The Faculty of Health Sciences welcomes its eleventh South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) chair this year with the establishment of the South African – Swiss Bi-Lateral SARChI Chair in Global Environmental Health. Awarded to **Associate Professor Aqiel Dalvie**, the chair will be based in the Centre for Environmental and Occupational Health Research, School of Public Health and Family Medicine. In partnership with the Swiss Tropical Institute, University of Basel, the purpose of the chair is to investigate the impact of environmental agents on human health using a multidisciplinary approach. In addition to stimulating new knowledge, the aim is to increase research capacity in this area in South Africa and Switzerland.

Prof Mohamed Jeebhay, Head of Department of the School of Public Health and Family Medicine, remarked that this is a wonderful opportunity to address global environmental health issues through multidisciplinary approaches utilising the research expertise of South African and Swiss researchers through this research chair.

“Environmental risk factors play a role in more than 80% of the diseases regularly reported by the World Health Organization (WHO),” he explains.

WHO estimates indicate that globally at least one quarter of all deaths and of the total disease burden can be attributed to the environment. This has important policy implications, since most environmental risk factors if well characterised can be modified through developing evidence-based, cost-effective interventions that can benefit society at large.

The South African Medical Research Council responds to cancer and founds Cancer Research Centres around the country



Professor Lynette Denny head of the new South African Medical Research Council's Gynaecological Cancer Research Centre.

The South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) has partnered with three of the country's major universities to establish cancer centres investing more than R37 million over the next five years. The University of Witwatersrand (WITS), University of Cape Town (UCT) and the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) have been selected to conduct research that ultimately seeks to tackle what has become one of the country's leading causes of death.

“The SAMRC is dedicated to exploring medical research in the hope of reducing the burden of non-communicable diseases such as cancers,” says the President of the SAMRC Professor Glenda Gray.

“We currently have an exceptional unit that focuses solely on non-communicable diseases but the rapid rise in the number of cancer-related deaths in South Africa in the last few years has urged us to further investigate the disease in the South African context.”

Professor Thandinkosi Madiba, Head of Surgery at UKZN, will head the KwaZulu Natal Prospective Gastrointestinal Cancer Research Centre while Professor Paul Ruff, Head of Medical Oncology Unit at WITS will head the SAMRC/WITS Common Epithelial Cancer Research Centre. Head of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at UCT, Professor Lynette Denny will head the SAMRC/UCT Gynaecological Cancer Research Centre.



(Left to Right) Prof Eric Bateman, Dr Ruth Cornick, Dr Naomi Folb, Assoc Prof Lara Fairall, Prof Bongani Mayosi and Dr Philip Campbell

On the 16th of January the editor-in-chief of *Nature*, Dr Philip Campbell, visited the Cape Town Lung Institute to meet with Professor Bongani Mayosi, Professor Eric Bateman, and members of the Institute's Knowledge Translation Unit (KTU).

Taking time off from his duties as part of a planning delegation for the forthcoming AIMS Next Einstein Forum, Dr Campbell requested a visit to the Institute to find out more about the pioneering and impactful research being conducted at the unit. In an informal and robust discussion, Dr Campbell engaged intently with the KTU team who spotlighted the impressive outcomes of the Primary Care 101 programme.

One of the most notable is the Practical Approach to Care Kit Package (PACK). A result of consistently fine-tuned research and practical implementation, PACK is a comprehensive clinical practice guideline that aims to equip nurses, other clinicians and community care workers to diagnose and manage common adult conditions at primary level. The clinical practice guidelines are evidenced-based, aligned with policy, regularly updated, and use an evidence-based implementation strategy called educational outreach.

Elaborating on their work, Dr Lara Fairall, the founding head of the KTU, described the highlights and challenges faced on the road to up-scaling the PACK project. The project, which was initiated in the Western Cape three years ago, has now rolled out across the country, to include highly localised integrated care, along with active collaborations across the world.

In addition to other topics, from an editor's perspective, Dr Campbell expressed a keen interest in discussing the dissemination of the impact of research. Dr Naomi Folb noted the challenges researchers encounter trying to gain traction for results, which are deemed small but nevertheless important. Speaking after the meeting, Dr Campbell pointed out that universities are often dealing with some of the most important challenges facing mankind. In some cases the research itself may be less profound in terms of new insights or in terms of the way the world works, but it does make a difference to people's lives. He added that governments are increasingly interested in this type of work and that a key area of concern was how to publish it in a manner that brings impact and illuminates what the impacts are in a significant and beneficial way.



Nature Volume 517 Number 7534 features an article by Prof Raj Ramesar, Head of the Division of Human genetics and Director of the MRC Human Genetics Research Unit titled "**Genomics: African Dawn**".



New MEC for Health shares her vision for province

Last month Interim Dean Prof Gregory Hussey and Faculty Heads of Department (HODs) had the pleasure of hosting Western Cape Provincial MEC for Health, Dr Nomafrench Mbombo. The Minister visited the campus for an informal meeting with HODs, which was followed by an address to the Faculty Board at the New Learning Centre.

Expressing a willingness to give audience to all her constituents, Dr Mbombo, who was recently appointed to the post, asserted her commitment to cultivating a culture of open dialogue with the Faculty. At the informal meeting, Prof Hussey invited HODs to introduce themselves, their departments and research orientations. An affable and relaxed Dr Mbombo then had the opportunity to engage on issues of concern to the different departments.

The Minister listened intently while adeptly fielding robust questions on everything from the Cuban doctors program to her plans for facilitating the efficient utilisation of resources to contribute to improved health science education. Overall consensus from department heads was that major strides had been made to improve training, research and teaching support. However, increased funding, cooperation between institutions and provinces, along with the socially responsive utilisation of existing infrastructure and intellectual capacity could impact the health system in an even greater way.

Dr Mbombo acknowledged the complexity of the issues, but nevertheless ensured Faculty members that she would make every effort to address the challenges of health sciences education in the Western Cape.

Addressing the Faculty Board, Dr Mbombo spoke about balancing budget constraints with priorities in a province where 80% of those using health services are uninsured. Four areas of concern were violence,

maternal and child health, youth and mental health, in addition to the role of substance abuse and the multiplicity of diseases such as TB, HIV/AIDS, hypertension, heart and diabetes.

Dr Mbombo spoke to her concern for the overburdened carers in the system, and the need to 'care' for them. Even though there are 33 000 staff members in the province, she said, there were still unfunded posts which if filled could lessen the burden on workers.

She emphasised her strategy would be to manage at the preventative and promotional level, working in partnership with community and private stakeholders. At the community level, there were over 2000 community care workers in the system in the province providing a much-needed service.

Dr Mbombo, who comes from an academic background having taught as a Professor at the University of the Western Cape for several years, has extensive experience in community-based health and public participation. She outlined the various structures - from Community Health Centre committees to the Provincial Public Health Forum - that are available to civil society to hold government to account, and that these should be used as a voice for the community in representing their interests.

Referring to the partnership with UCT, and the interface of tertiary care with PHC, Dr Mbombo spoke about how PHC underpinned all levels of the health system, and that she would like to see our training platform extended to the rural areas, and that there be more courses offered for specialisation, such as to address the need for more specialised nurses in the province.

"It's all about closing the tap", she concluded, using a metaphor for tackling the source of a problem.



Professor Ole Pettersen Ottersen

Dean's Forum – global governance and health inequity

The popular Dean's Forum got off to a flying start with an insightful and engaging lecture on global health governance. Delivered by Professor Ole Pettersen Ottersen, rector of the University of Oslo, the lecture explored the power disparities and dynamics across a range of policy areas that affect health and that require improved global governance.

Professor Ottersen chaired the Lancet – University of Oslo Commission on Global Governance for Health of 2014, which was established to examine the political origins of health inequity, with a focus on 'global governance'. Reporting on the findings, Prof Ottersen explained how the Commission analysed seven different arenas outside health and the extent to which decisions made within them impact the sector.

Despite large gains in health over the past few decades, the distribution of health risks worldwide remains extremely and unacceptably uneven. Although the health sector has a crucial role in addressing health inequalities, its efforts often come into conflict with powerful global actors in pursuit of other interests such as protection of national security, safeguarding of sovereignty, or economic goals.

Speaking in some detail about market supremacy, Prof Ottersen pointed out that very often health is subordinated under market forces to the extent that affordable and accessible healthcare are overlooked. Using examples such as the Ebola crisis, he stressed the importance of no longer viewing health as a technical issue arguing, that the efficacy of targeted interventions and health policy is dependent on the creation of a global environment that is conducive to their success.

After his lecture, a robust discussion was chaired by Emeritus Professor Marian Jacobs in which several members of the audience unpacked the role of universities in contributing to the eradication of health inequality. Prof Ottersen, who said he was first and foremost an educator, suggested the revision of medical curricula to incorporate the structural influences of disease such as global political policy and conflict.

Including politics, economics and conflict studies in health education would ensure that students develop a more nuanced perspective on the root causes of health problems. Read more about the Commission and report [here](#)

Second year physiotherapy students take oath



Associate Professor Marc Blockman, guest speaker at the Division of Physiotherapy oath taking ceremony, conveyed an important message at the auspicious event in February.

“Just as a vet is expected to love animals, a health care professional must have inherent love for humans and humanity”.

These were his closing remarks to the 64 students who had just taken their professional oath in preparation for their clinical practice.

His lecture on professionalism was a fitting accompaniment as the pledge upholds students to strict standards in their profession. Emphasising the values of empathy, ethics and service, he urged students to be compassionate and non-judgmental in their practice. Deputy Dean, Associate Professor Gonda Perez, led the oath. Standing as they recited the words, students committed themselves to taking care of the total well being of their patients and the promotion of good health for all citizens.

Leading academic praises gastrointestinal unit

By UCT News



(Left to Right) Prof Sandie Thomson, Prof Paul Fockens, Mrs Inge Marks, Mrs Karen Tollman, Mrs Rosemary Griesel and Dr Stuart Sanders

The commitment to the practice of gastroenterology at UCT's Gastrointestinal (GI) Clinic has left a lasting impression on a world leader in the field, who recently served there as a visiting professor.

Professor Paul Fockens, from the University of Amsterdam's Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, concluded his two week visit to UCT with a lecture titled *Therapeutic endoscopy 2015: Gastroenterology or Surgery?* on 5 February. Reflecting on his experience at UCT, Fockens remarked that he was honoured to be the 2015 Solly Marks Visiting Professor - and was also pleased to get away from the sub-zero temperatures in Amsterdam!

"I have enjoyed sampling the camaraderie and common purpose of consultants and trainees in the GI Unit, particularly the efforts of the clinic to take the training and technical aspects of advanced endoscopy forward as an essential part of modern gastroenterology. Equally, I was educated by seeing the committed practice of gastroenterology, the different pathologies and resource constraints in a different health care environment to my own."

In 2014, the Department of Medicine in the Faculty of Health Sciences established the Solly Marks Visiting Professorship Fund in tribute to the legacy of Professor I.N. "Solly" Marks. As founder of the GI Unit at Groote Schuur Hospital and the South African Gastroenterology Society, Marks made a profound contribution to the development of gastroenterology both locally and internationally.

Prof Sandie Thomson, Head of the GI clinic, said Fockens' period as the Solly Marks Visiting Professor had been very productive. "It was our privilege to have one of the leading exponents on interventional endoscopy on the premises and upskill our Faculty and trainees in a variety of procedures."

"Marks would be very proud of Paul's contribution as it is a testament that his influence on the practice of gastroenterology will continue to enhance the efforts of the UCT GI Clinic way into the future," Sandie Thomson.

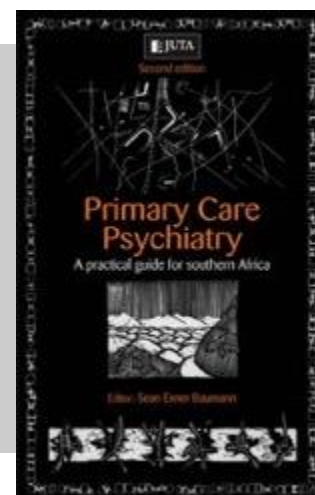
Photo by Michael Hammond

Resource for mental health practitioners – 2nd edition book launched

Dr Sean Exner Baumann recently celebrated the launch of the second edition of his book *Primary Health Care Psychiatry: A Practical Guide for Southern Africa*.

During a quaint affair at the Wild Fig Restaurant, in Observatory he expressed his gratitude to all involved in making the project a success. Speaking about the book he said the aim was to make it accessible and readable to a variety of people, from the student to the specialist, who deal with the mentally ill.

As a resource for mental health practitioners, Dr Baumann added that the structure, writing and editing of the book were geared towards making the text meaningful and relevant by addressing the South African context.





Back (from left to right): Sr Ursula Algar; Dr Tracey Adams; Professor Jennifer Moodley. Front (from left to right): Professor Melvyn Freeman; Professor Raj Ramesar; Dr Tracey Naledi

There are solutions was the key message at the UCT Cancer Research Initiative (CRI) seminar on 3rd February to commemorate World Cancer Day, attended by stakeholders from the public and private sectors.

“The day was an opportunity to raise awareness of how much can be done - at individual, community and governmental levels - to address the burden of cancer,” said CRI Director, Dr Jennifer Moodley, “and we focussed on Cancer Genetics and Cancer Control, an area that is sometimes neglected and considered beyond us.”

Prof Melvyn Freeman, Chief Director of Non-Communicable Diseases, National Department of Health provided an overview of the National Department of Health plans for the prevention and control of cancer in South Africa. The plan prioritises cancers that affect the majority of South Africans and seeks ways to implement the most cost-effective, feasible interventions. Prof Freeman highlighted that “cancer is not just a health issue- it's a development issue” and therefore the next step in the development of a comprehensive plan for prevention must involve a holistic approach with involvement of all governmental and non-governmental sectors.

Dr Tracey Naledi, Chief Director Health Programmes

“Not Beyond Us” Cancer activists commemorate World Cancer Day

The theme for 2015 World Cancer Day World illustrates the optimism among cancer researchers, health professionals, advocates, policy makers and patients that solutions do exist across the continuum of cancer, and that they are within our reach.

By Vedantha Singh

(Western Cape Department of Health) noted that there is much work to be done. South Africa requires healthy people to contribute meaningfully to community life and that cancer prevention costs have 10 times the benefits of treatment. Dr Naledi reiterated that the national cancer plan would need increased investment and commitment from all sectors of government. She emphasised the importance of screening and surveillance programmes for improving survival, emphasizing the critical importance of a strengthened health system, a transdisciplinary approach and increased community engagements.

Other guest speakers included Professor Raj Ramesar from the Division of Human Genetics, Institute of Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine (IDM), who spoke on the role of genetics in monitoring cases and assessing risk factors for cancer; Dr Tracey Adams, a consultant gynaecological oncologist (UCT/Groote Schuur Hospital) who described the role of genetic testing in ovarian cancer detection, prevention and treatment; and Sr Ursula Algar, Groote Schuur Hospital who outlined the story of a cancer survivor.

“The seminar also provided an opportunity to discuss the ongoing progress and contributions of genetic research to the early detection, prevention and treatment of cancer,” says Dr Moodley.

Shavathon brings splashes of colour to campus courtyard



Campus came alive with an injection of colour on the 6th of March when the Prince lab, from the Department of Human Biology, hosted an event for the 12th annual Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA) Shavathon on Barnard Fuller courtyard.

Scores of students and staff supported the event, which was in its fifth consecutive year, by lining up to adorn their heads with bright colours and funky stencil designs.

Losing one's hair is a common side effect of cancer therapy – so shaving or colouring hair has become a symbolic gesture of support for cancer survivors. Run with the involvement of SAMSA and The Humanitarians (NPO No: 135-447), the event rose over R 5000, which was donated to CANSA for the support of cancer survivors.

The Prince lab is a CANSA funded research group whose research focuses on various hallmarks of cancer, using these to elucidate mechanisms by which cancer develops as well as possible improved therapies to treat cancer.

Staff in the Prince lab feel strongly about contributing to the welfare of cancer survivors and sufferers. Many of them have been touched by the devastating effects of cancer in some way or another, through family members, friends and acquaintances.

Highlighting both the individual and social significance of the Shavathon, Ms Sandra Jordaan, Senior Scientific Officer from the Department of Human Biology, said the event:

“is therefore not only a professional commitment to our research, but also a personal awareness of the toll of this disease on society, that motivates us to raise community-wide awareness by continuing to host this event at UCT Faculty of Health Sciences”.

FACULTY NEWS EDITORIAL TEAM

Editor: Linda Rhoda

Acknowledgements: Faculty colleagues who submitted stories, and special thanks to UCT News (Communication and Marketing Department) for use of their stories.

Writing: Linda Rhoda, Jackie Kwenda and UCT News

Images: UCT News, Faculty colleagues and as attributed

O Week Rocks!

New students get acquainted with campus life, sign up for societies and end the week with optimism!



Vice Chancellor Dr Max Price welcomed first year students with encouragement on the opening day of Orientation week. An auditorium full of bright-eyed and eager incoming undergraduates listened as Dr Price imparted useful tips for making the most of their time at university. Much like a journey through uncharted territory, the first year of university is replete with new experiences, challenges and surprises along the way.

Dr Price impressed on them the importance of abandoning their comfort zones and embracing the multicultural, diverse and exciting environment they now found themselves in. Spelling out UCT's core values, which include a commitment to academic freedom and social justice, he asserted that they had the right to think out the box, and express controversial views but also bore the responsibility to address social inequality by virtue of their membership in an elite group of society as UCT students and future graduates. His final words urged them to focus on adjusting in the first semester and to seek out a holistic university experience, by balancing academics with social activities.

Later on in the week, the Barnard-Fuller Plaza was abuzz with enthusiastic students, music, and a variety of societies eager to sign up new recruits. First-year students took the time from their jam-packed orientation schedule to join societies, talk to newly made friends and buy much needed books from the second hand stall. The DJ Society and UCT Radio, who kept the mood upbeat and buoyant, provided entertainment on both the days.

The excitement was palpable as Orientation Week drew to a close and, despite the grey clouds on the last day, the ballroom society thrilled onlookers with a few dance routines in the middle of the courtyard. Aware that the end of orientation marked the beginning of classes, and academic work, many students were optimistic and hopeful about beginning their journey to becoming health practitioners.

"I want to make a name for myself and study cancer, because it's affected some close relatives of mine so maybe one day I will make a contribution to stopping it," said Phumi, a first year medical student.

Her enthusiasm for her studies was matched by Zinyi, a first year physiotherapy student who said, **"I am looking forward to taking the opportunity...my first short term goal that I have is to have at least three distinctions in my first semester. It's still a wish, it's still a hope but I will go for it."**

Apart from academics, and a chance to fulfil long-held dreams students were equally happy to be away from home and thrilled at the chance to meet new people. Speaking about orientation, Caroline, a first year physiotherapy student said she was pleased to see diversity unlike she was accustomed to at school and appreciated being able to have an opinion without being judged for it. For many first years orientation, ended on a high note, brimming with hope and optimism for the future.





Ashley Jacobs and Joana Alçada explain their winning proposal to judges (not in picture is the third member of the group, Tim Ellis).

Collaboration key to postgraduate research

For the novice academic, research and all its trappings can prove both exhilarating and daunting. Embarking on a career in research requires not only, personal motivation and support from supervisors but also, knowledge on how to navigate the varying aspects of the PhD experience. In recognition of this, the Imperial - UCT Global Health Fellows Programme was created to cover the key professional skills needed by early stage PhD researchers to improve both their personal and research effectiveness.

This weeklong summer school, hosted on upper campus in late January, is a collaboration and capacity development project run by Imperial College, London, and UCT, via its Clinical Infectious Diseases Research Initiative. The initiative fosters greater consciousness of global health research and prepares PhD students (representing multiple countries at the summer school) for world-class, international collaboration.

As such, much of the week saw the students learning new skills in the areas of effective and creative teamwork, communication in diverse groups, intercultural and international awareness.

Activities culminated in group project proposals, from which judges drawn from senior researchers involved in the programme chose three finalists.

The judging panel harnessed the "assembled wisdom" of Professors Tumani Corrah (director of Africa Research Development at the UK MRC, based in Gambia), Kathryn Maitland (Paediatric Infectious Diseases at Imperial College, based at the Kenya Medical Research Institute), Robert Wilkinson (director of UCT's Clinical Infectious Diseases Research Initiative, and Imperial College London), Prof Tania

Douglas, and Dr Hanif Esmail (Oxford/Imperial/UCT).

The winning project proposal described a new pump to easily administer an inhaled drug for treating and controlling lung injury and loss of function caused by TB. The project harnessed three parallel drug development branches, combined in one product to expedite drug delivery.

Team members Tim Ellis, Joana Alçada and Ashley Jacobs are attached to Imperial College. Jacobs is also a UCT health sciences graduate, one of several among the fellows. Commenting on his experience Ashley Jacobs said, "There was such a great wealth of diversity in terms of backgrounds and budding expertise, and this made for a stimulating learning environment. I think one of the highlights for me was the sessions focussed on communication and collaboration, as this is an under-appreciated but crucial skill-set in research."

In keeping with the objectives of collaboration, combining the research interests of each group member was a prerequisite for the project proposals.

This benefited participants in that it highlighted **"the dynamics between nations of the North and the South, in collaboration efforts to address key diseases such as Tuberculosis, HIV and Malaria. Through bringing students together from around the world, it was possible to address the issue of collaboration balance on an enjoyable and informal basis, ultimately with the hope of forming relationships that would facilitate collaboration in the future"** said Tim Ellis.

The programme ended on a high note, amid a general sense that it had succeeded in cultivating academic awareness while sowing the seeds of collaboration and friendship.



Medicine and the Arts: Humanising Healthcare

UCT's first MOOC explores the intersection of medicine, medical anthropology and the creative arts.

By Abigail Calata

In 2011 Stanford University launched three of them. Two years later Beijing's Tsinghua University hosted over 50 of them and today tens of millions of students from around the world now access free tertiary-level courses on MOOC platforms such as Coursera and FutureLearn. So what exactly is a MOOC?

A MOOC defined

According to UCT's Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching website, a MOOC is a form of self-directed distance learning that offers free online courses with no entry requirements: "They are designed for mass participation and assume that learners will drive their own education, studying alongside diverse fellow students who may come from anywhere in the world. They allow for features such as interactive online forums that can involve hundreds of students in peer-to-peer discussions, as well as access to video and audio lectures and course materials in online format."

In other words, imagine a virtual classroom in which thousands of students can all watch or listen to a lecture at a time of their own choosing and at their own pace, after which they can join in a group discussion amongst hundreds of students who may hail from opposite sides of the globe. What is UCT's first MOOC about? In the case of Medicine and the Arts: Humanising healthcare, the course will run for six weeks, starting on 16 March 2015, on the UK-based MOOC platform FutureLearn. Each week students will be able to download and watch a recorded video lecture that is then followed by online discussion and assignments. Students will receive feedback on their assignments from their peers.

At present over 2 000 students have already registered.

The content of the MOOC is as innovative as the technology used to disseminate it. The idea behind the course is to examine the intersection of medicine, medical anthropology and the creative arts. This emerging field of medical humanities brings together vastly different disciplines to explore what similarities and differences exist between the way art and medicine approach their subjects. The course's six lectures have titles like 'The heart of the matter', 'Art and the brain', and 'Children's voices and healing'. They will feature the expertise of poets, patients, oncologists, visual artists, surgeons and psychologists.

It is this multidisciplinary approach which Prof Steve Reid, one of the two academic leads on the course (the other is UCT social anthropologist Dr Susan Levine), finds so exciting. "This course offers the universal appeal of being not just medical or about art but about larger questions of identity and humanity. The content will be captivating since the six teams, each of whom handle a separate lecture, are comprised of experts from such different fields. For example, in the lecture about the heart, we will be hearing from a heart surgeon, a poet and someone who has received a heart transplant. I think this provides a very exciting opportunity to break down the barriers between highly specialised disciplines and a general audience as well as provide us with more pedagogical insights." By the end of the course, students will have been encouraged to examine how bodies, health, society, culture and the imagination intersect and apply to their own local contexts. Certificates of participation will also be available from FutureLearn.

Why does a local MOOC matter?

The New York Times proclaimed 2012 to be the "Year of the MOOC". In many quarters MOOCs were seen as a panacea for the ills of tertiary education and a means to democratise knowledge on a global (and affordable) scale. Some of this hype surrounding the advent of MOOCs has now given way to criticism. MOOCs it turns out are being made and accessed by the very groups who, it could be argued, need it least: wealthy and predominantly male students from the northern hemisphere who already have a university degree.

In light of this new wariness, and given the fact that South Africa's digital divide hampers the ability of such a platform to offer universally accessible education, why is it important that UCT has now joined the ranks of those universities offering this kind of learning?

For Laura Czerniewicz, director of the Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching (CILT), MOOCs are a Trojan horse into online engagement in a variety of forms and a means of addressing the imbalance in how knowledge is produced and disseminated around the world.

"The vast majority of MOOCs being produced in the world are being offered by universities in the global north while their students are from every corner of the world, including some very remote. This has the effect of rendering invisible local knowledge and curricula. It is really important for universities in Africa and other countries in the global south to produce MOOCs based on local knowledge, experiences and curricula to counter this dominance and to ensure heterogenous participation and contribution to knowledge creation and education."