

Stop press!

Vice-Chancellor's Open Lecture

on Thursday 3 March
At 17h00 in the Baxter
Theatre Concert Hall

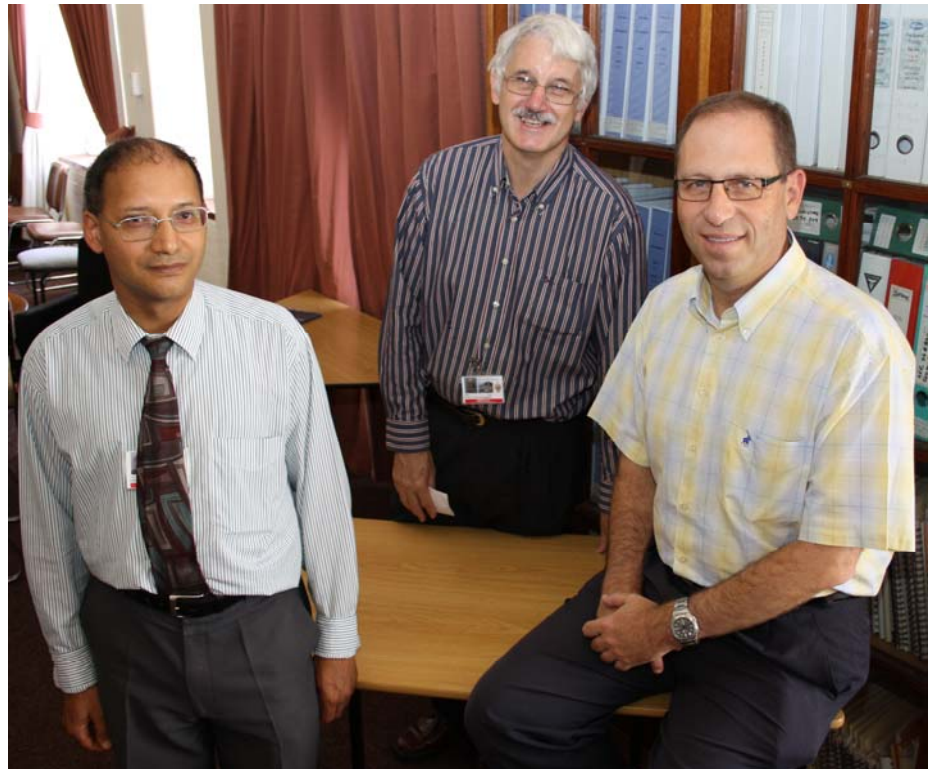
Speakers:

Dr Francis S. Collins, Director
of the National Institutes of
Health (NIH), USA

Sir Mark Walthorp, Director of
Wellcome Trust, UK

Limited seating will be
available on an RSVP basis—
invitations will be emailed out
shortly

Hat-trick of Heads for the Department of Medicine ...



The Department of Medicine boasts three new heads of division: from left: Prof Marc Combrinck heads up Geriatric Medicine, Prof Sandie Thomson (back) Gastroenterology, and Prof Alan Bryer in Neurology. What makes the appointments to Gastroenterology and Geriatric Medicine unique is that they were made after an eight-year search period in each case - for Gastroenterology it took three selection committees and as many DVCs to solve the problem! Prof Bongani Mayosi, Head of the Department of Medicine said: "I think the fact that we were able to make these appointments represents an improvement in the fortunes of academic medicine in our faculty - due to investment in training PhDs in clinical medicine." Both Professors Bryer and Combrinck are UCT PhDs.

DEANERY CORNER: Professor Susan Kidson

The new year is well under way and for the excited (and sometime nervous) new intakes, coursework formally begins this week. Our undergraduate courses remain in very high demand and, as before, we are forced to make difficult decisions about who is in and who is not in. So difficult in the face of so much talent.

This year sees the start of a new Intercollegiate BSc(Hons)(Med) degree for students doing an MBChB. This initiative is intended to grow the numbers of clinician-scientists in South Africa. To prepare students for entry into honours studies, a select few are, this year, taking a third-year level course in Molecular Medicine. Successful candidates will be eligible for entry into honours in 2012. We congratulate all role players in getting this venture off the ground, and we look forward to seeing the fruits of their labours in the years to come.

The faculty also sees, this year, a significant number of new offerings at

postgraduate level, with modular postgraduate diploma and coursework master's degrees being the favourites. Global audiences are being reached and tapped, and students are joining up from far and wide to participate in our new, unique offerings. One of the challenges is to find the best way to enable seamless transfers of students from diplomas to degrees (and vice versa when necessary). Another is to fine-tune our policies on Recognition of Prior Learning, so as to put us in a position to make better judgements on international applicants to our courses. With the new courses and new staff, have come innovations in teaching methods and delivery of learning materials. Online and Open Education Resources are being developed and implemented, and it is clear that UCT needs to revisit its policy regarding distance education.

Also new in 2011, is the HPCSA policy on registrar training, requiring for the first time, that all registrars conduct a research project during their four-year training. While some

specializations have long required such research projects (dissertations) as part of their training, others have not done so, and are in the midst of developing staff capacity for supervision and mentoring. Resourcing and financial barriers must be overcome, and, even in busy clinical work schedules, time must be found to set aside for research activities.

With this rise in student numbers and courses has come the ever-increasing pressure on our teaching spaces, and we continue to squash our students into venues not designed or optimised for quality teaching. On the horizon too, is the possibility of significantly increasing the numbers of students in our undergraduate medical programme. Careful and deliberate space planning is vital, as is the securing of funds for our projects and for the improvement of ICT capabilities at all sites in the academic health complex. To all those with a penchant for planning, please volunteer, your faculty needs you!

Excellence is key for new IIDMM head

Professor Valerie Mizrahi took over the reins of the directorship of the Institute of Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine (IIDMM) on 1 January 2011 and brought with her a newly formed partnership with the University of the Witwatersrand and Stellenbosch University in the form of a national centre of excellence for TB research.

Professor Mizrahi's background is in mathematics and chemistry, but after earning her chemistry PhD at UCT in 1983, she took on a postdoctoral fellowship in biochemistry at Penn State University in the US, in the lab of the world-renowned enzymologist Stephen Benkovic, then returned to South Africa in 1986 to join the Centre for Molecular and Cell Biology, based at Wits and supported by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research.

Following a year of "hard-core biology", Mizrahi returned to the US to join pharmaceutical giant Smith Kline & French to work in the field of HIV drug discovery. "So I went from chemistry to biochemistry to molecular biology to drug discovery, and I think this is where my interest in infectious disease research was inspired," she said.

In 1989 Mizrahi finally decided to settle in South Africa and returned to launch the Molecular Biology Unit at the South African Institute for Medical Research. But after two years of HIV research, Mizrahi once again reached a T-junction and abruptly changed directions.

"I realised that TB was an underexplored, hugely important area in which I could use my knowledge as a biochemist. But I knew nothing



about microbiology or genetics, so again I had to learn."

Steering her lab team in this new direction Mizrahi established the Molecular Mycobacteriology Research Unit, jointly funded by the South African Medical Research Council, the National Health Laboratory Service and Wits in 2000 and then served as co-director of the Centre of Excellence for Biomedical TB Research, jointly funded by the Department of Science and Technology and National Research Foundation.

"Repeatedly, I have been given the freedom to reinvent myself," says Mizrahi, "and this has helped define my career. I believe that giving young people with fire in their bellies an opportunity can make all the difference."

Now at UCT's IIDMM, Mizrahi not only takes the reins as institute director from Professor Greg Hussey, but is also comes on board as head of the UCT node of the partnership with Wits and Stellenbosch in the Centre of Excellence for Biomedical TB Research.

Mizrahi plans to bring a "mycobacterial physiology and genetics presence" to some of the clinically orientated TB work at the IIDMM.

Excellence is a word that has followed Mizrahi throughout her career. "There's no room for mediocrity here. Excellence is what I've aspired towards in my own work and excellence is what this institute is about."

Mizrahi acknowledges that to call the goals of TB research daunting would be a gross understatement.

"We need better vaccines, shorter treatments and better diagnostics. Taking the existing regimen of TB drugs for six months is very tough on patients. Yes, they work, but the most recent drug we use was developed more than 40 years ago. And in diagnosing TB, we are still reliant on methods that have been used for over a century.

"This is why world-class research on diseases such as tuberculosis is so important. Better tools for controlling TB will revolutionise our ability to deal with a disease that preys on poverty and social inequality—problems that continue to plague our continent."

R18-million from EC for health policy and systems

The School of Public Health & Family Medicine's Health Policy and Systems (HPS) programme has secured R18-million for an Africa-Europe network to support capacity development in the field of health policy and systems analysis.

The activities will include curriculum development, staff development and engagement with policy makers in national and regional levels, as well as building a network among the organisational partners. Capacity development in this field was highlighted as critical for the future at the end of last year during the First International Symposium on Health Systems Research convened in Montreux.

This new network (CHEPSAA, the Consortium for Health Policy and Systems Analysis in Africa) builds on earlier activities funded by the Ford Foundation. It brings together 11 organisational partners from South Africa, Tanzania, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, UK, Sweden and Switzerland for the period 2011 to 2014, and



Prof Lucy Gilson.

is funded by the European Commission. Given the lack of other similar initiatives, CHEPSAA will be a trail blazer in this field.

"The development of sustained African health policy and systems research capacity requires the consolidation and strengthening of relevant research and educational programmes as well as the development of stronger engagement between the policy and research communities", said HPS director Professor Lucy Gilson. "CHEPSAA's goal is to extend sustainable African capacity to produce and use high quality HPS research by harnessing synergies among universities with relevant expertise."

The first CHEPSAA activity for partners will be to carry out a needs assessment that supports HPS research capacity development.

Following this, partners will develop staff and training capacity in each African organisation and develop organisational & country networking strategies.

Students who are making a difference

The Cancer Association of South Africa (Cansa) is launching a range of services at the Bonteheuwel Community Centre, following research conducted by fourth year (currently 5th year) medical students.

Mahomed Haffejee, Patricia Leighton, Nokuthaba Ncube, Nnyalleng Raptsoe and Martin Verheij undertook the research as part of their Public Health block.

A recent media report outlines the plans, which include support groups for cancer survivors, carers of cancer patients, as well as bereavement groups.

Gail Roman, of Cansa Patient Services: Cape Metro Region, explained that being diagnosed with cancer is a life-changing experience, and patients and their families feel shocked, overwhelmed and sometimes helpless in the face of the diagnosis.

Through the research conducted by these students, cancer patients and their carers have the opportunity to voice their concerns and fears and receive support from members of the community who have gone through something similar.

CI children's rights course

The Children's Institute (CI) recently launched a new short course on *children's rights and child law for health professionals*.

The course is designed to deepen health professionals' understanding of children's rights in international and national law and to enable them to apply these rights in their daily practice. Up-to-date training on the new Children's Act is also provided, with a particular focus on children's consent to medical treatment and the reporting of child abuse.

This residential five-day course was developed by the CI in collaboration with Child Rights Education for Health Professionals (CRED-PRO), an international initiative based at the University of Victoria, Canada.

The course was piloted at the end of January at Red Cross Hospital and brought together health educators from universities and nursing colleges across the country including the universities of Cape Town, Stellenbosch, Witwatersrand, Pretoria, and Fort Hare, as well as representatives from the Department of Health and CRED-PRO.

The curriculum is structured into six modules that promote a broad, rights-based



The Persona Dolls, developed in South Africa by Carol Smith, were just one of the innovative tools introduced at the training to help stimulate conversation between children and health professionals.

approach to health and encourage health professionals to take active steps to promote children's rights both within their individual practice, the health care system and beyond.

The mix of formal and interactive teaching methods allowed doctors and nurses to draw on

their own expertise, to share and learn from one another, and to consider how children's rights inform current policies and practice. The use of video and children's radio helped bring children's experiences to life and encouraged health professionals to listen to children and take them seriously. A series of case studies based on actual practice provoked rich discussion and debate around children's rights, law, ethics and how best to promote children's best interests in practice.

At the end of the course, educators were provided with a set of training materials to share with students and colleagues. An online network will be established in March so that educators can share materials and explore how best to integrate child rights and child law into pre- and in-service training for health professionals.

To find out more about how the new Children's Act affects health professionals, visit the Children's Institute website (www.ci.org.za) and download a copy of a *Guide to the Children's Act for Health Professionals*.

For more information about the course and online network contact Lori Lake (lori.lake@uct.ac.za).

Congrats to ...



... Kim Lamont, who won the Best Oral Presentation Prize at the Joint UK-SA Cardiovascular Research Workshop that took place in London in December 2010. She is photographed with Prof Derek Yellon, of the University College, London.

... the Clinical Pharmacology Laboratory in the Department of Clinical Laboratory Sciences, and part of the Institute of Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine, who recently received a R1.6-million infrastructure grant from the AIDS Clinical Trials Group (ACTG) Network in the US. The ACTG, funded by the US's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease (NIAID), has awarded the five-year grant to set up the CPL as a "reference laboratory" for its human drug trials.

The funding will be used in part to cover the salaries of the experts in the laboratory, and support the quality assurance programmes in the CPL to get it up to NIAID standards.

SATVI and Aeras brief Parliament on TB

TB vaccine partners, the South African Tuberculosis Vaccine Initiative (SATVI) and the Aeras Global TB Vaccine Foundation (Aeras), addressed the Portfolio Committee on Health at Parliament on Tuesday, 25 January 2011, to inform them about South Africa's leading role in finding a new, more effective TB vaccine.

SATVI is the leading TB vaccine clinical trial site globally, and is the only site in the world that is testing more than 1 TB vaccine simultaneously. Aeras is a major collaborating partner with SATVI and supports TB vaccine research globally.

Annually, TB infects 9 million people, and 1,7 million people die of the disease. An opportunistic disease, TB becomes active in weakened immune systems, so is a serious concern for HIV infected people. HIV-TB co-infection is a major problem, particularly in Africa. The current TB vaccine, BCG, only protects children from serious forms of TB, but is not effective against lung TB in adults, the most common form of TB.

SATVI co-Director, Dr Hassan Mahomed, pointed out that although new, more efficient diagnostics and drugs were important tools necessary for curbing TB, a new TB vaccine was essential for preventing the disease. The Chairperson of the committee, Dr Monwabisi Bevan Goqwana, himself a former physician in the public health service, agreed, saying that TB treatment costs are placing pressure on health

services, with the disease impacting negatively on the economically active members of the population.

The Head of the Aeras Africa, Mr. Sebastian Gelderbloem, outlined the progress made in TB vaccine development globally, with 14 new vaccine candidates in clinical trials, 4 of which are being tested by SATVI. International and national partnerships and collaborations were necessary for finding a new vaccine. The Department of Health was a significant partner in supporting new TB vaccine development, and Aeras and SATVI had ongoing support from all levels.

Aeras, SATVI and their partners are committed to developing an effective TB vaccine which would be affordable for developing countries. SATVI co-Director, Professor Willem Hanekom, pointed out the need for greater funding support for TB vaccine research from within South Africa, with most TB vaccine research being funded through overseas grants. This was greatly disproportionate to funding granted to AIDS research, in spite of both being widespread and related health problems.

Following the presentation to the committee, SATVI and Aeras were pleased that the Committee, which has an oversight role on health matters in South Africa, acknowledged the important work being done by SATVI and Aeras, and supported their call for more internal funding for TB vaccine research in the country.

Cancer Research Trust pays a visit to the Faculty



The trustees of the Cancer Research Trust—a long-standing supporter of the Faculty of Health Sciences, held its first meeting of the year at the Faculty on Friday, 11 February 2011. The proceedings included presentations by recipients of funding, the formal trust meeting, and an informal discussion over lunch as to the future direction of the Trust and the ways in which it can support the Faculty in the future.

Back, from left: Emeritus Professor JP van Niekerk (trustee), Dr Jim McNamara (Executive Director of the Development and Alumni Department, Graham Ledbitter (BOE), Dr Shaheen Mowla (Cancer

Research Trust funding recipient), Peter Canning (BOE), Professor Anna-Lise Williamson (Cancer Research Trust funding recipient), Carlette Hlungwani (Faculty Research Admin Manager) and Professor Raj Ramesar (Cancer Research Trust funding recipient).

Front, seated from left: Emeritus Professor Boet Domissee (trustee), Professor Marian Jacobs (Dean), Dr Max Price (Vice-Chancellor), Dudley Cloete-Hopkins (chairman of the Cancer Research Trust) and Emeritus Professor John Terblanche. Professor Geoff Everingham, also a trustee, had to leave early, and Professor Gregory Hussey, who represents the Faculty on the Trust, was not available.

Scenes from Plaza Day 2011 ...

... where student societies recruit new members from the first-year intake

