

Zimbabwe and Gaza in the spotlight at Human Rights Day event

In commemoration of Human Rights Day, which also marks the 40th anniversary of the Sharpeville Massacre (21 March 1969), the Faculty of Health Sciences hosted two local consultants to Physicians for Human Rights, one of them a member of the Faculty.

Prof David Sanders, the Director of the School of Family Health and Public Medicine at the University of the Western Cape and Prof Sebastian van As, the Head of the Trauma Unit at the School of Child and Adolescent Health in the Faculty reported back on their experiences in Zimbabwe and Gaza recently, as members of Physicians for Human Rights task teams sent to the respective countries to assess the current situation.

Prof Sanders spoke first, and spoke eloquently of the suffering of the people of Zimbabwe following the complete breakdown of the health system in Zimbabwe.

One of the most telling signs of the appalling conditions in Zimbabwe was the treatment of the team sent in to undertake the assessment. They were described in Zimbabwean media as: "Four bogus physicians ... on a spying mission ... exposed! They breached their mission and held meetings with ... opposition political leaders ... on



issues pertaining to security in Zimbabwe."

Rather than leaving via the airport, where they were sure they would be detained, the team elected to hire a vehicle and drive out of the country. Their report was released in December 2008, and offered damning evidence of gross human rights abuses.

Problems highlighted included the complete breakdown of the public health system—from a critical shortage of manpower, drugs, and consumables, to a lack of water and electricity, resulting in a limited number of Zimbabweans with access to private healthcare as a result of having to pay for treatment in US dollars, because professionals in private practice would not accept payment in Zimbabwean dollars.

Prof David Sanders, (left) of the University of the Western Cape and Prof Sebastian van As (below), Faculty of Health Sciences at UCT.



Prof Sebastian van As was asked to join a team of five experts early in 2009 to investigate the medical human rights situation for Palestinians in Gaza following the most recent armed conflict in that region. Among their tasks was to assess the general medical situation, investigate attacks on medical institutions and ambulances, denial of medical care of the injured, and the use of illegal weapons, particularly against civilians. What they found was horrifying. Patients were not being allowed out of Gaza for medical treatment and without this treatment, several patients died. Ambulance drivers were regularly under fire and weapons such as phosphorus and flechette bombs

had been utilized during the conflict, resulting in horrific injuries. Many of the weapons used were designated "anti-personnel", which resulted in many soft tissue injuries and amputations, and many of the people affected were civilians. The team reported similar problems with nutrition and access to basic facilities such as electricity and clean water. Prof van As explained that many injuries, specifically those of children, were "indirect victims", such as the little girl who was badly burned when she ran to find her mother during a helicopter attacks and knocked over a paraffin stove in the dark.

The Gaza report was released on Monday, 6 April 2009.

DEAN'S CORNER

Every year, in March, April and May, we have a series of public holidays which commemorate aspects of human rights.. On 21 March, a day on which we mourned the repression of Sharpeville, we now celebrate the institution of the South African Constitution and the launch of the South African Human Rights Commission. On 27 April, we celebrate the birth of democracy; and on 1 May, along with others from across the globe, we acknowledge the rights of workers.

Our Faculty has not stood aloof from the significance of these days, nor have we been passive in our observation of human rights. We conduct an annual training programme on health human rights, which attracts students from across Africa; we conduct research in

various fields related to health human rights; we have made submissions to the Human Rights Commission; and we convene commemorative gatherings to which we invite speakers. In March, we were addressed by the Deputy Minister of Health who challenged us - as an institution of civil society and as citizens with rights and responsibilities under the Constitution - to become more active in advocacy for compliance with the right to health. And in April, Prof David Sanders and Prof Sebastian van As shared their experiences as members of Physicians for Human Rights delegations to Zimbabwe and Gaza, reported further in this newsletter.

But is that enough? Is there more that we should be doing? Closer to our own practice,

we are reviewing our recruitment and admissions approaches in advancing the right of access to our faculty. In acknowledgement of the right of every member of the Faculty community to be heard - and taken seriously - we are also exploring opportunities for greater participation in the faculty's planning processes. These are good intentions, but we can only be held to account if the channels already in place - such as Faculty Board - are fully utilised.

Although much less lofty a goal than the responsibility of electing national leadership, the right to participate in the Faculty dialogue offers a real opportunity, right here at home, and we welcome any ideas for how this right can be realised in our own backyard.

Publication of the Month

Too often in academia, we feel obliged to compete with our sister institutions, whether for research grants, personnel or even the number of beds in our teaching hospitals. In truth, however, we can make the greatest impact when we combine our talents and efforts. This month's publication is a perfect example: Schaaf HS, Zumla AI, *Tuberculosis: A Comprehensive Clinical Reference*, Saunders, ISBN 978 1 4160 3988 4, 1008 pages, 2009.

Edited by Simon Schaaf, Professor of Paediatrics at Stellenbosch and Ali Zumla, Professor of Infectious Disease at University College London

and an Honorary Professor of Medicine at UCT, many of the chapters are authored by UCT's clinician scientists and our colleagues from Stellenbosch. This book provides all the vital information you need to know about tuberculosis, especially in the face of drug-resistant strains of the disease. Coverage includes which patient populations face an elevated risk of infection, as well as which therapies are appropriate and how to correctly monitor ongoing treatment so that patients are cured. Interested readers will learn how to administer screening tests, interpret their results, and identify manifestations of the disease.



Ivan Toms.

Remembering Ivan Toms at a memorial lecture

Deputy Minister of Health, Molefe Sefularo, was the guest speaker at the inaugural Ivan Toms Memorial Lecture, which was hosted by the Faculty of Health Sciences on Wednesday, 11 March.

In her introductory speech, the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences, Prof Marian Jacobs spoke highly of Toms' commitment to policy-makers, health managers and service providers, academics, members and volunteers of NGO/CBOs, and civil society activists.

Dr Sefularo explained that "Due to his (Toms') pioneering work, the Western Cape, owing to the overwhelming influence of the Cape Metro, can boast of what is clearly the best public primary health care system in the country." He went on to describe some defining incidents in both Ivan Toms' life and how they impacted on the health care sector, both in the Western Cape and nationally.

In particular, Dr Sefularo supported a proposed documentary on the life of Toms, an activist, UCT graduate and, at the time of his death in March 2008, director of health at the City of Cape Town.

Meeting millennium development goals will be a challenge for South Africa

Africa is the only world region unlikely to meet the United Nations 2015 Millennium Development Goals as a result of health-care deficiencies, Professor Vanessa Burch said in her inaugural lecture, *Health Care in South Africa Today*, on 25 March. Africa is constrained by several challenges, including a heavy burden of disease, lack of money, and the size and shape of the clinical platform. The burden of disease in South Africa is growing, fuelled by HIV/AIDS, said Burch, who is based in UCT's Department of Medicine.

"HIV prevalence levels are not flattening out. TB cases have more than doubled and there hasn't been an increase in staff or resources."

The problems are exacerbated by the growing divide between public and private healthcare.

Whites still have the greatest



Prof Vanessa Burch.

access to healthcare insurance - but 42.7 million South Africans don't have healthcare insurance. She also pointed out that the number of beds in the public sector hadn't risen, despite a growing burden of disease.

It is also difficult to recruit

doctors to work in rural areas, where there is one doctor for every 30 000 people, said Burch. Only 31% of the country's 34 687 doctors work in the public service; 35% of posts are vacant, and 15% of these are specialists.

"The rural situation is desperate."

The country - and continent - would have to increase the number of medical graduates, and recruit more than one million additional healthcare workers to cope with the burden of disease. However, the situation was aggravated by migration.

"Twenty-two percent of our medical graduates are no longer practising in South Africa."

"There are no simple solutions. We need multiple strategies and feasible options in healthcare, for the greater good of all. But it's going to cost money."

Helen Théron



Table Mountain ablaze

Abdu Mohamed took this photo from one of the level 6 windows of Falmouth Building on 18 March, as helicopters battled the blaze on the slopes of Devil's Peak.

The fire broke out on Tuesday, 17 March, above Rhodes Memorial and took almost two days to bring under control. Two homeless people died as a result of the blaze.

Approximately 500 hectares of park land were burned in the fire. Members of the Faculty took food to the Roeland St Fire Station in appreciation of their sterling efforts.

Monthly Quiz – new book on Groote Schuur takes centre stage

In the recently published book about Groote Schuur Hospital, *At the Heart of Healing*, there are two photographs of Professor Ralph Kirsch conducting ward rounds. In what years were the photos taken and how do they differ?

Send your answers to: kit.vaughan@uct.ac.za. Answer to last month's quiz: the main FIFA representative at the launch of the Medical Centre of Excellence at the Sports Science Institute of South

Africa was Professor Jiri Dvorak. Although currently based in Switzerland, he is originally from the Czech Republic. First with the correct answer was **Pete Meissner**, who wins the book voucher.

News from around the Faculty

A right royal affair ...



Our very own Dr Liz Gwyther, Course Convenor and Senior Lecturer in Palliative Medicine, School of Public Health & Family Medicine and the CEO of the Hospice Palliative Care Association of South Africa (HPCA), had an opportunity to meet HM Queen Elizabeth at a cocktail function held at St James' Palace, London on 16 March 2009. The event was held to mark the 25th Anniversary in 2009 of the founding of Help the Hospices by Anne, Duchess of Norfolk in 1984.

Making a vital contribution ...



Emeritus Professor Ralph Kirsch receives a certificate of appreciation from former SRC chairman, Thulani Madinginye, at a recent luncheon hosted by the University for his contribution to the Chancellor's Challenge fundraising appeal. Photo: Abdu



New vaccines website for IIDMM

A new African-based website, VACFA, Vaccines for Africa (www.vacfa.com), was launched on Tuesday, 31 March, by the University of Cape Town's Institute of Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine (IIDMM) in partnership with concerned individuals and organisations to increase awareness and promote uptake of vaccines on the African continent.

This forms part of the Vaccinology Initiative of Professor Gregory Hussey, Director of the IIDMM, who is the driving force behind development of the site.

"Our vision is an Africa free of vaccine-preventable diseases. Africa lags behind other continents in the uptake of life-saving vaccines, even though vaccine-preventable diseases are causing avoidable deaths in Africa. There needs to be a co-ordinated advocacy effort from within Africa to change this, and much of this is about access to information," says Professor Hussey.

The VACFA site is intended to be an interactive forum for the exchange of accurate, up-to-date and evidence-based information on vaccines and immunisation practices relevant to Africa, and to be a strategic resource for health professionals, policy-makers, programme managers, parents, and the general public.

The VACFA Advisory Board is made up of a panel of experts and specialists in vaccinology, spread across Africa, who will not only guide the strategic direction of the site, but also share their knowledge and expertise on the site. Hussey describes the site as dynamic. "We will be expanding it on an ongoing basis, and chose to initially focus on Rotavirus, as many African countries are to start rolling out vaccines in their EPI programmes to stop the most common cause of severe dehydrating diarrhoea in young children."

The site has applied for accreditation with the Vaccine Safety Net of the World Health Organisation. The website team is keen to get feedback from users. Dr Charles Shey Wiysonge, the Vaccinology Manager administering the site, can be contacted at

Mourning the death of a pioneer in paediatrics

Lucy Wagstaff, a pioneer in the burgeoning field of Community Paediatrics and Child Health in this country, passed away in Johannesburg on Thursday March 27.

Professor Wagstaff graduated from Witwatersrand University in 1952. After specialising in Paediatrics, she began practice at Baragwanath Hospi-

tal. There she developed a special interest in improving the health of children in the surrounding townships. She saw the community nurse as a key figure in this role and set up training programmes in nurse-based primary child health care management, the first to do so in South Africa. A Chair in Child Health was established for her by the Stella and Paul

Loewenstein Charitable and Educational Foundation, and this was later followed by the establishment of Chairs in Cape Town, Durban. She was co-editor, with Professor MA Kibel, of the first three editions of *Child Health for All: A Manual for Southern Africa*. After her retirement she continued to practise and teach, taking a special interest in training in the

Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (IMCI) a course developed by WHO and UNICEF in the 1990's. It was while returning from one of these courses that she was involved in a serious car accident from which she never fully recovered. Lucy was a gentle and much-loved figure who will be sadly missed.