



FACULTY News



DECEMBER 2008 | FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES | UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

SAAVI's AIDS vaccine clinical trials begin

Two South African developed HIV vaccines have begun clinical testing in the United States and South Africa. Two vaccines developed by the University of Cape Town through joint funding from SAAVI and NIAID, NIH will be tested.

The South African AIDS Vaccine Initiative (SAAVI), which is a lead programme of the Medical Research Council and is supported by the South African government, this week announced the start of the phase I safety trial in the USA. The trial, called SAAVI 102/HVTN 073, will be conducted jointly with the HIV Vaccine Trials Network (HVTN) and the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), part of the US National Institutes of Health (NIH).

This phase I trial will start in Boston, in the USA next week. Testing in South Africa will start in early January 2009. The trial has been approved by the South African Medicines Control Council (MCC) and the Directorate of Biosafety in the Department of Agriculture (which approves products using genetically modified organisms). The US arm of the trial will involve 12 participants whilst the South African arm, once approved, aims to recruit 36 participants from two sites, one in the Western Cape and another in Gauteng.

"We are delighted that this vital project has reached such a critical stage in its development and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the people who have contributed their time and expertise to allow us to reach this point," says Prof. Anna-Lise Williamson, leader of the team at University of Cape Town's Institute for Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine. "This is a massive achievement, for us it is the culmination of eight years' work, made possible, to a large extent, by SAAVI funding and a strong partnership with NIH."

"Interventions to prevent the spread of HIV infection are urgently needed and the news that testing of a new vaccine in the USA will commence this week is thus welcomed, says Prof. Greg Hussey, Director of the Institute of Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine. "The IIDMM and UCT are extremely proud to be associated with the SAAVI, who have been involved in the development of the vaccine."

Huge excitement at Results Bash 2008 ...



Tricia Pickard (centre of the crowd) hears that she has been awarded the MBChB Gold Medal for the Most Distinguished MBChB Student Graduating with Honours.



From left: Stefanie Wichmann, Tricia Pickard, Anne Aling and Lydia Darby receiving their results.

DEAN'S CORNER

December should bring time for respite and renewal. And yet such opportunity seems elusive as we toil like the mythological Sisyphus, whose punishment – throughout eternity - was to roll a huge boulder up a hill, only to watch it roll down again. Yet, there is much evidence that, unlike the unrewarding experience of Sisyphus, the hard work of the faculty continues to reap rich rewards.

In 2008, we produced 291 undergraduates who will enter the health sector equipped with the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes. At the other end of the academic spectrum, we graduated 42 PhDs – the highest number ever

– along with a large number of honours, masters and other MD graduates. We have not only maintained the Faculty's tradition of excellence, but continue to advance the frontiers of our academic endeavours, as well as expanding our continental and global footprint.

Although, like Sisyphus, our toil feels endless, our work is hugely rewarding, and the full scope of this evidence will be published in our first annual report next year.

I remain deeply appreciative of every staff member's contribution to a making ours a phenomenal Faculty, and wish you and your families well for a peaceful and safe season.

Publication of the Month

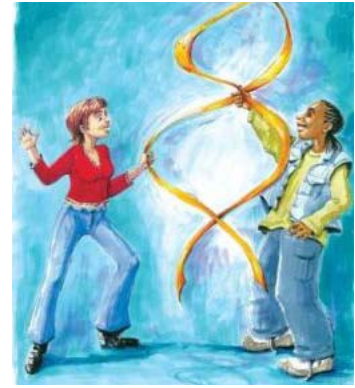
One of our responsibilities in academia is to take the time to make our work understandable to a lay audience. This is exactly what this month's featured publication accomplishes.

Khumalo NP (2008) *Genes for Teens*, Yigugu Publishers, Cape Town, ISBN 978-0-620-41012-0.

Nonhlanhla Khumalo speaks directly to teenagers. The book uses jeans as an introduction to a light-hearted discussion of genes and their 'teen relevant effects' including sex, pregnancy, skin (acne, smelly underarms etc); it also

discusses the biology of skin colour, its evolution and the meaning of 'race.'

According to Nonhlanhla, she "never had any aspirations to write a book; however, an experience I had a few years ago changed my life. Although I have looked after dermatology patients with HIV, the impact of this disease hit me when one of my young cousins died of AIDS; I felt compelled to do something! And so I decided to share my love of biology with teenagers in their language". The book can be ordered directly via Amazon.com.



Congratulations ...

... To the MRC/UCT Research Unit for Exercise Science and Sports Medicine for recent confirmation of their accreditation as a FIFA Medical Centre of Excellence in South Africa. Special thanks must go to Prof Martin Schwellnus, for all the time and effort that he has put into ensuring that all of the necessary documentation was produced and submitted timeously. An official inauguration ceremony, hosted by FIFA, will take place shortly.

Monthly Quiz

This is a follow up to last month's quiz. What day of the year are the Nobel Prizes awarded and what is the significance of this particular day? Send your answers to kit.vaughan@uct.ac.za.

Answer to last month's quiz:

The Nobel Prize for Medicine or Physiology was divided equally, one half to Harald Zur Hausen for his discovery of human papilloma viruses causing cervical cancer, and the other half jointly to Françoise Barre Sinoussi and Luc Montagnier for their discovery of the human immunodeficiency virus. Robert Gallo considered himself unlucky not to share the award. Candice Samuels was the winner of the book voucher. Well done!

IIDMM earns top marks in international review

From 2 to 4 November 2008, the IIDMM, the largest research institute at UCT, which has been in operation for the past 5 years, underwent a major scientific review by the International Scientific Advisory Committee (ISAC), chaired by Professor Valerie Mizrahi, Director of the MRC/NHLS/WITS Molecular Mycobacteriology Research Unit.

The ISAC noted that the IIDMM has shown considerable growth and development during the period under review, that the research conducted at the IIDMM is internationally competitive, that the publication record of the institute is very impressive and has shown steady growth since 2003 and that the record is particularly noteworthy when bench-marked against the FHS, UCT as a whole

and comparable institutions in South Africa. ISAC also noted that members of the unit have been successful in securing highly competitive international grant funding both for clinical and laboratory research and that the research is cutting-edge in a number of areas.

The IIDMM was complimented on the emergence of considerable strengths at the laboratory/clinical/community interface, which has positioned the IIDMM as a leading site globally for TB-HIV research, the bridging across the Faculties of Science and Health Sciences, as evidenced by research in HIV/HPV vaccinology and the Drug Discovery Signature Theme, and the extensive collaborative research networks that have been established at national, regional and

international levels.

Significant challenges identified included attracting, retaining and rewarding staff, accessing long-term funding for resources, equipment and staff, increasing funding support from the University and ensuring that strategic research areas like bioinformatics and structural biology are not neglected. The ISAC also suggested that changes be made to the management structure and membership criteria.

"The IIDMM intends to sustain an environment of high calibre research and productivity that will attract international researchers and secure a future for Africa's promising new generation of scientists, from an integrated basic science, clinical and public health perspective," concluded Prof Greg Hussey, Director of the IIDMM.

World AIDS Day 2008 at IIDMM



The 20th anniversary of World AIDS day was celebrated with sweet treats at the IIDMM on Monday, 1 December 2008. "We wanted to do something celebratory as it is the 20th anniversary of World AIDS Day and we are celebrating 20 years of enthusiastic and successful campaigning," said Kate Snyder. Photographed from left: Kate Snyder, Dr Felicity Fitzgerald, René January, Nazli Fortune and Kaanita Fortune.

Hats off to Health and Rehab



Spotted at the Health and Rehab end-of year function: above: Lana van Niekerk, Harsha Kathard and Hanske Flieringa, and below: Helen Buchanan and Nicki Fouche.



Recycling and reusing in the Human Biology Department

A year ago, a small group of concerned people within the Human Biology department decided to address the considerable amount of paper materials going to waste.

The Human Biology (HUB) Recycling Initiative was established and has rapidly grown to embrace the collection of not only paper but also plastics and tin. To this end, attractive receptacle bins have been placed on each level of the Anatomy & Cell Biology Building providing convenient access for staff and the many students that pass through the department.

On a fortnightly basis, recyclables are collected *gratis* by OASIS Association for their in-house income generating waste recycling project and in this way we support their employment of intellectually impaired young adults. For the year 2008, 350 black bags filled



HUB Recycling Initiative, from left: Thhogi Selaledi, Morea Petersen, Gabi de Bie, Barbara Young and Cathy Hole.

with recyclable materials have been donated to the OASIS scheme.

Our Vula site — GreenMatters @ HSF — carries information on local and global environ-

ment matters, health and safety issues and generally advances the cause of planetary custodianship. You are invited to join the site and become part of the green team.

Visitors to the Faculty



A visit from our neighbours to the north

Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences, Prof Marian Jacobs (front, second from left) with the Dean of Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences of the University of Namibia, Dr Lischen Haoses-Gorases (front, third from right) with representatives from the University of Cape Town (UCT) and the University of Namibia (UNAM) at a meeting, which was held on Tuesday 24 November 2008, to explore progress made in the establishment of a Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences at the University of Namibia. UCT is one of several universities that are involved in the establishment of this faculty, two of the European partners being The Free University of Berlin, Germany, and Oulu University of Finland. Olli Vainio, Vice Dean of the Faculty of Medicine of the Oulu University is photographed in the back row, third from right.

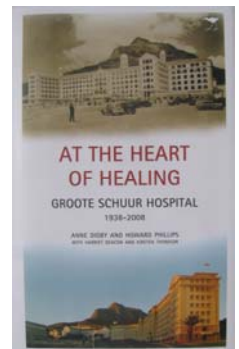


Renewing old friendships—class of 1993

From left: Martin Forlee, Riaz Ismail and his wife Riyana, Khairunisa Barday, Zunaid Barday, Carol Goedhals and Beth Welsh.

Groote Schuur Hospital history launched

There was standing room only at the launch of a book examining the history of Groote Schuur Hospital, entitled *At the Heart of Healing, Groote Schuur Hospital 1938 - 2008*. The event took place on Monday, 24 November 2008 in the Barnard Fuller Building of the Faculty of Health Sciences.



According to Prof Howard Phillips, Professor in the Department of Historical Studies at UCT, co-author of the book, along with Prof Anne Digby of Oxford Brookes University, Dr Harriet Deacon and Ms Kirsten Thomson, the long process began in 2005, drawing on voluminous archival material and many personal interviews, to provide “a rich, probing history of Groote Schuur Hospital, in the round and in context.” *At the Heart of Healing* provides a new kind of hospital history, described as a “history in-in-the-round” in its inclusive coverage of staff and patients. Prof Phillips points out that the authors have taken particular pains to recognise both the “beauty spots and warts” in their attempts to provide a balanced history of this landmark hospital.

In her foreword, the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences, Prof Marian Jacobs, describes the history of the hospital as “a microcosm of the history of South Africa”.