



FACULTY News



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

Faculty Considers its Shape and Size

Our Dean recently hosted a one-day retreat at Mont Fleur, a beautiful conference facility in the hills above Stellenbosch. Facilitated by Paul Abrams, this was an opportunity for 20 of the Faculty's senior leadership (Dean, Deputy Deans, Heads of Academic and PASS Departments) to spend quality time together to consider our future.

One of the activities involved a game between two teams, where the possibility existed for both cooperation and competition. Key negotiators included Reno Morar and George Swingler (seen below in earnest discussions) and participants learned valuable lessons about themselves. This has important implications for the Faculty, particularly our relationships with our key partners, the Provincial Government and the University.



Di McIntyre's Inaugural Lecture

The Faculty's inaugural lecture series for 2008 got off to a marvellous start at the end of July, with new Vice-Chancellor Dr Max Price in attendance, and our Dean, Professor Marian Jacobs, introducing the speaker. Di McIntyre, who has just been promoted *ad hominem* to Full Professor and awarded a DST/NRF South African Research Chair in 'Health and Wealth' (conversely, ill-health and poverty), presented her lecture entitled "Just health care: people or profits?" to critical acclaim.

In her lecture, Di took a critical look at the current health system and the challenges facing it. She particularly considered how the growth of the private for-profit health sector and the systematic under-resourcing of the public health sector (despite the growing demands on it related to the HIV/AIDS epidemic) had brought the South African health system to a point of crisis. She highlighted the massive inequities in the resources available in the public and private health sectors relative to the size of the population served by each (with the majority of funds and health professionals being in the private for-profit sector which mainly serves the 14% of the population covered by medical schemes). She challenged recent press reports which have called for the removal of regulations on the private for-profit sector and outlined how leaving this sector to its own devices would only drive up the costs of health



care further and therefore undermine efforts to provide health services that benefit all South Africans.

Di referred to plans to introduce a National Health Insurance (NHI), in line with a resolution adopted at the ANC's Polokwane conference in December last year. The goal of the NHI is to transform the health system so that individuals contribute to funding health care according to their ability to pay and benefit according to their need for health care. She called for substantial increases in public spending on health care, increased autonomy and improved governance in public hospitals and an expansion of publicly funded primary care services which draw on accredited group practices (staffed by general practitioners, primary health care nurses and other health professionals). Her final message was that a well-functioning, publicly funded health system can contribute significantly to redressing not only inequities in health status but also in income distribution.

Two New Professors Appointed

The Faculty is delighted to announce the appointment of two new Professors: Peter Meissner, in Medical Biochemistry (see photo below); and Heather Zar in Paediatrics (see page 2).

Aside from an 18-month period as Post-doctoral Fellow at the University of Georgia in the USA in 1992-93, Peter Meissner has been at the University of Cape Town for the past 27 years. During this period he worked first with Professor Lennox Eales in the MRC/



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DEAN'S CORNER

In September, the UN General Assembly will adopt a resolution to establish a new UN Women's Agency, with a focus on strengthening the UN's response to women's issues. This news was received with acclaim this week at the Mexico AIDS Conference, where the former UN Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa hailed this agency as having the potential to "put women's voices where they belong, in the forefront of the response to the pandemic."

This announcement comes at a time when, as a nation, we have identified the month of August as an opportunity to reflect on our progress with advancing women's rights, and for

our faculty, to celebrate our contribution to this national priority. In this regard, some figures provide insight into our current situation. Across all undergraduate programmes, women constitute 69,8% of this group of students, while for postgraduates, the figure is 55%, making an overall proportion of 64% female representation in our student body. We have some way to go in achieving the same distribution at the other end of the academic spectrum, but are making steady progress with - in this year alone - two of the newly appointed professors having been women.

In terms of our equity targets, we have much to celebrate, yet numbers are not the only

measure of progress. As important is the quality of women's experiences across the faculty. Hence our challenge is to identify those policies, practices and attitudes which still stand in the way of women's efforts to reach their full potential. This does not only apply to women in PASS departments and in academic health endeavours, but also those women who constitute a large part of the outsourced workforce - in particular, the women who serve as part of our security system, and those who keep our campus clean.

To the Editor: My sincere apologies for delaying the publication of this month's newsletter.

Publication of the Month

Since this issue of the newsletter comes to you from South Carolina where your editor is currently visiting, I have chosen to highlight a publication by one of our Faculty's distinguished alumni, Dr Marc Chimowitz, who has recently been appointed Professor of Neurology and Associate Dean of Faculty Development at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston. He led the NIH-funded trial on Warfarin Aspirin Symptomatic Intracranial Disease (WASID) that led to this important paper:

Chimowitz MI, Lynn MJ, Howlett-Smith H, et al. "Comparison of warfarin and aspirin for symptomatic intracranial arterial stenosis", *New England Journal of Medicine*, 352(13): 1305-1316, 2005.

Atherosclerotic intracranial arterial stenosis is an important cause of stroke. Warfarin has commonly been used in preference to aspirin for this disorder, but these therapies had not been compared in a randomized trial. Chimowitz's team randomly assigned patients with transient ischaemic attack or stroke caused by stenosis to

receive warfarin or aspirin in a double-blind, multicentre clinical trial. After 569 patients had been enrolled, the trial was stopped because of concerns about the safety of the patients who had been assigned to receive warfarin.

Since warfarin was associated with significantly higher rates of adverse events and provided no benefit over aspirin in this trial, the authors recommended that aspirin should be used in preference to warfarin for patients with intracranial arterial stenosis. Given the cost implications, this was an important finding.

Alastair Millar Next for Inaugural Lecture

Mark up your calendars for the Faculty's next inaugural lecture that will be presented by Alastair Millar, Professor of Paediatric Surgery in the School of Child and Adolescent Health. His lecture, entitled "Surgery for Children: in Search of Perfection", will be delivered on Wednesday 27 August 2008 at 17h30 in the Student Learning Centre.



Monthly Quiz

In the story above, I have highlighted the research of Marc Chimowitz. He has something in common with another distinguished UCT alumnus, Allan Cormack. What is it that links the two? Send your answers to: kit.vaughan@uct.ac.za.

Answer to last month's quiz: the other person, besides Dr Max Price, who went from Dean of Medicine to Vice-Chancellor was Dr Thomas B Davie, a Stellenbosch graduate who had been Dean of Medicine at Liverpool before his appointment as Principal and Vice-Chancellor of UCT in 1948. Melvorna Wakefield was the winner of the R100 book voucher. Well done!

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UCT Porphyria Research Unit and then subsequently with Professor Ralph Kirsch in the MRC/UCT Liver Research Centre.

Pete earned all three of his degrees at UCT: a BSc in Biochemistry, Chemistry and Oceanography in 1978, an honours degree in medical biochemistry in 1982, and finally a PhD in 1992 with a thesis entitled "Enzyme studies in variegate porphyria". He is best known for his research on the phenotype-genotype relationship in variegate porphyria (the most common form of porphyria encountered in South Africa), with a special focus on the structure-function aspects of the defective protein in this disorder.

Among Pete Meissner's awards are included the Bernard Pimstone Prize for the best young investigator in 1984 and 1987, a Wellcome Trust Senior Research Fellowship (1997-2002), and a UCT Fellowship (2005) in recognition of original distinguished academic work.

In addition to his contributions as a research scholar, Pete has also been a stalwart committee member in the Faculty, chairing the Doctoral and Masters Committee for the past three years, and serving as a member of both the Research and Postgraduate Affairs Committees. With his new appointment as Professor in Medical Biochemistry, he will be moving from the Department of Medicine in the old GSH to the Department of Clinical Laboratory Sciences in refurbished facilities in the Falmouth Building.

Heather Zar is a paediatric pulmonologist and clinician scientist who was previously Head of Paediatric Pulmonology at Red Cross Children's Hospital. She currently serves as Chair of the Research Committee in the School of Child and Adolescent Health. An MBChB graduate of the University of the Witwatersrand in 1985, she went on to specialise in paediatrics at Baragwanath Hospital. She then undertook 3 years of subspecialist training in paediatric pulmonology at Columbia University in New York, USA which included laboratory and clinically-based training.

Heather then returned to South Africa, pursuing an academic career (including a PhD at UCT in 2000) while working at Red Cross Hospital. As a clinician scientist, her work encompasses research, clinical responsibilities, education and training. Her research, focusing on child lung health, uses a translational approach to apply complex technology to clinical problems using a wide range of methodologies. She has

published extensively in high impact journals, mentored a number of students, and has numerous national and international research collaborations.

She has been involved in the development of global and African educational and research exchange networks such as the virtual international paediatric pulmonology network and the Pan African Thoracic Society. She has been the recipient of numerous awards (one of 3 finalists for the DST's Distinguished Women in Science award in 2006, and the recipient of a UCT Fellowship in 2007), and holds a leadership positions in professional organisations. Heather has frequently been an invited speaker at international academic meetings, is a frequent reviewer for high impact journals. She was promoted, *ad hominem*, to Full Professor in 2007 and has now been appointed to a personal chair in the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health.



Melanie Jackson Joins Faculty

The Faculty is very pleased to welcome Ms Melanie Jackson who joined the Faculty at the beginning of the month. Reporting to the Dean, Melanie is our new Manager for Development, Communications and Marketing.

She joins us from UCT's Development and Alumni Department where she served as relationship manager for Corporations and Trusts. With a National Diploma in Journalism, Melanie brings a wealth of experience to this important position in the Faculty. In addition to her first job as a journalist in Durban, she has also seen service as a fund raiser for St Mary's Hospital in Mariannhill, a communications specialist for the South African Red Cross and marketing coordinator for Oxford University Press.

Among the duties Melanie will be taking on is the editorship of Faculty News. Please take the time to welcome Melanie to the Faculty (see details below) and don't hesitate to send her those interesting stories!

