

Issue 5 • January to June 2025

# Haematology News

The official Newsletter of Haematology, UCT



Welcome to the biannual newsletter for Haematology at the University of Cape Town.

This newsletter seeks to share the latest on local haematology-related news, activities, and achievements.

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## Spotlight on HHT: A Voice for the Undiagnosed



Hereditary Haemorrhagic Telangiectasia (HHT) is a rare yet serious genetic condition that often goes unrecognised—particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Characterised by abnormal blood vessels (telangiectasias and arteriovenous malformations [AVMs]) and frequent, severe nosebleeds, HHT can lead to complications such as iron deficiency anaemia and life-threatening AVMs in the lungs, liver, or brain.

The BLOODSA Foundation, under the guidance of Prof. Estelle Verburgh, is working to change this. In a recent interview with CapeTalk's Pippa Hudson, Drs. Nicolé Smith and Gerdien Kritzing shared the Foundation's vision to raise awareness, support early diagnosis, and improve care for HHT patients across the country. A link to the interview is shared below.

[listen here: https://lnkd.in/eyAVm8eD](https://lnkd.in/eyAVm8eD)

The Groote Schuur HHT Clinic, established by Prof. Verburgh in 2020, delivers multidisciplinary care to patients living with HHT. Since inception, our patient cohort has grown from 5 to 19 active patients, and regular intravenous iron therapy means that none of our current patients require blood transfusions. A key milestone has been the creation of a WhatsApp support group, currently serving around 30 patients from Groote Schuur and Universitas (Bloemfontein) hospitals. Steered by a dedicated patient advocate, this group has become a vital space for sharing experiences, offering support, and improving the quality of life for patients living with HHT.

Looking ahead, BLOODSA will be hosting South Africa's first-ever HHT conference on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September 2025, with five international experts joining local clinicians, patients, and advocates. As awareness grows, so too does hope—for better diagnosis, coordinated multidisciplinary care, and ultimately, better outcomes for patients living with this challenging condition. For more information about the conference, click on the links below:

<https://bloodsa.org.za/event/hht-horizons-innovation-collaboration-and-care-in-south-africa/>  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/DKRj3gTMZ2R/>

## Recent events

### Exploring Career Paths in Haematology with Prof. Niels van de Donk

E5 Haematology had the honour of welcoming Prof. Niels van de Donk to our Tuesday morning journal club, where he shared valuable insights into career development in haematology. Prof. van de Donk, a full professor and myeloma specialist at Amsterdam UMC, offered reflections on his clinical and research journey—from studying pharmacy and completing his PhD on multiple myeloma in 2003 at the University Medical Center Utrecht to a fellowship at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston. Since 2014, he has worked at VU Medical Center as a Professor of Haematology, leading innovative myeloma research and clinical trials. His engaging discussion highlighted the diverse opportunities within the field and left attendees excited about the future of haematology.



The photograph shows the Haematology team with Prof. Niels van de Donk (front row, left of Prof. Estelle Verburgh).



We are pleased to announce Kelechi Nnene (photo on the left) has been appointed to the Division of Clinical Haematology, in collaboration with BLOODSA. Kelechi is a trained pharmacist and is soon to graduate with a Master's in Public Health. She joins the team as a Health Economist and Analyst, working in the Aplastic Anaemia and Bleeding Disorder registries, as well as alongside Dr. David Richardson to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of current and emerging treatment strategies in lymphoma. Her appointment strengthens our capacity to integrate health economic perspectives into clinical research and decision-making, ensuring better value and outcomes for patients.



## UCT Hosts Successful FCPATH (Haem) Exams – Congratulations to Our Candidates!

The Division of Haematology, in the department of Pathology at the University of Cape Town successfully hosted the recent FCPATH (SA) Haem part II examinations under the leadership of A/Prof. Jessica Opie, our Head of Division. We are thrilled to announce that two of our candidates (Dr V Parker and Dr M du Toit) successfully passed – a remarkable achievement that reflects their hard work, commitment, and excellence. Congratulations to them both!

We celebrated these achievements with a well-deserved lunch – complete with smiles, congratulations, and a group photo (below) to capture the moment!



Pictured above in the back row from left to right: Drs. Wandile Mhlongo, Sharon Officer, Lauren Lemkus, A/Prof. Jessica Opie, Drs. Kathleen DeJohn, Rory Shein, Kingsley Lohlun, A/Prof. Karen Shires and Dr. Edward Koen. Middle from left to right: Drs Zeena Fuad and Ellouise Adams. Front row from left to right: Drs. Marcel du Toit, Athenkosi Kema, Victoria Parker and Daleen Kriel.





A/Prof. Estelle Verburgh (photo above, left) and Dr. Brigid McMillan (photo above, right) attended the DKMS (Deutsche Knochenmarkspenderdatei, or German Bone Marrow Donor Centre) Awards Night on 31 March in Florence, where Dr. McMillan was honoured with the prestigious DKMS Special Grant. Following the awards ceremony, they participated in the 51st Annual European Bone Marrow Transplant (EBMT) Meeting, held from 31 March to 2 April 2025, also in Florence.



Dr Fiona Watt (MSc student) attended the International PNH Interest Group (IPIG) 2<sup>nd</sup> scientific conference in Paris, 15-16 May.

## Human Rights Month Toiletry Drive: Supporting AGS Sarepta Old Age Home

In celebration of Human Rights Month in March, the Haematology Transformation and Equity Committee recently held a heartfelt initiative to support the residents of the AGS Sarepta Old Age Home. The drive aimed to provide the residents with essential toiletries to help support comfort, dignity, and care.

Thanks to the generosity of our colleagues across all divisions, we were able to make a meaningful contribution to the well-being of these residents. Your support brought not only practical assistance but also a message of compassion and solidarity.

A sincere thank you to everyone who donated and helped make this initiative a success.



Pictured above is Ms. Jolene Brooks with residents of the AGS Sarepta Old Age Home.





### Teamwork on and off the bench!

On Sunday, 8th June, our haematology team traded lab coats for paddles in a spirited biannual social. Despite the rain, doctors paired up for a competitive (and hilarious) round of padel on the indoor court. The event served up plenty of teamwork, energy, and laughs—proving once again that our doctors bring the same passion and camaraderie to the court as they do to clinical care.



## Farewells



We bid farewell to Prof. Vernon Louw, who has taken up the role of Head of Internal Medicine at Tygerberg Hospital. A deeply passionate and caring teacher, Prof Louw's dedication to education, mentorship and patient care has left a lasting impact on all who had the privilege of working with him. His leadership and warmth will be greatly missed – we wish him every success in this exciting new chapter.

Dr. Gamu Tadzimirwa Clinical Haematology Consultant, has taken a position at a Panarama Hospital, Durbanville, embarking on a new chapter spreading and challenging the horizons of what private practice could look like in South Africa. We wish her all the best and look forward to a continued and fruitful working relationship with our Unit. She continues to teach fellows and provide academic support, and we hope that despite the distance the relationship will continue to grow strong!

It was with a heavy heart that we said goodbye to Nomalizo Sineke, our social worker who retired in May. She has been the stalwart and centre of our Unit for the last 20+ years. She was loved by our patients and staff alike and we will miss her dearly!

We also say a fond farewell to Dr. Brigid McMillan who for the past two years, has enriched and delighted our professional lives and extended consummate care to our patients. She will take up the DKMS grant in July, further pursuing her PhD studies with Prof Vernon Louw at the University of Stellenbosch.



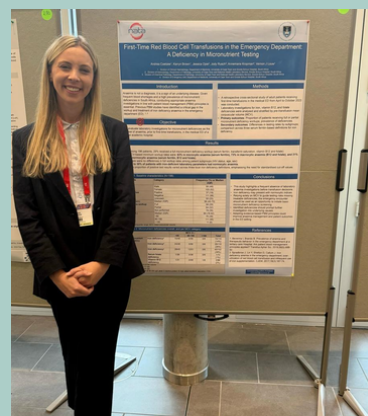
## Conference presentations

E5 Clinical Haematology was well represented at the Janssen Haematology Symposium held in Johannesburg on 15-16 February 2025. Our team –Prof. E. Ver Burgh, Dr. G. Tadzimirwa, Dr. S. Baloyi and Dr. T. Dicks– delivered engaging and informative sessions covering a range of topics, including myeloma, CLL, and Waldenström's macroglobulinemia. Additionally, discussions on patient advocacy and Johnson & Johnson innovative medicine (JJIM) haematology in South Africa provided valuable insights.



Dr Athenkosi Kema attended the International Myeloma Society (IMS) Education Workshop held in Johannesburg from 28 February to 1 March 2025. Dr Kema contributed to the programme with two presentations: a case discussion titled "Smouldering Myeloma with Delayed Progression to Multiple Myeloma" and preliminary data on "HIV-associated Multiple Myeloma in the Era of Antiretroviral Therapy."

Poster presentation: First-Time Red Blood Cell Transfusion in the Emergency Department: A Deficiency in Micronutrient Testing. Presented by M.Sc. student, Dr. Andrea Coetzee (pictured on the right). Written with Prof. V Louw, A/Prof J Opie, Dr. J Rusch, Dr A Kropman and K Brown. Conference: Network for the Advancement of Patient Blood Management, Haemostasis and Thrombosis (NATA), April 2025, Munich.



Oral presentation: Treatment costs for patients with colon cancer at Groote Schuur Hospital, South Africa. Presented by Health Economist & Analyst, Kelechi Nnene. Written with Dr L Cunnam, Prof JE Ataguba, and Prof Moodley  
Conference: African Health Economics and Policy Association 7<sup>th</sup> Scientific Conference, March 2025, Kigali.

## Grants, partnerships, awards/honours and promotions

A/Prof. Shaheen Mowla and her team were successful in their application to the University Equipment Committee in 2024 and were granted the funding award in January 2025 to purchase the Olympus CKX53 inverted microscope with innovative phase contrast and fluorescence capabilities. This instrument will support innovative experimental approaches to our research, for instance, it will enable targeted and detailed visualization of cellular components, and enhance the training of our postgraduate students.

A/Prof. Shaheen Mowla was also granted an SAMRC funding award under the call “Genomic Insights into the Pathogenesis of Cancer and Infectious Diseases” in partnership with the Japan Agency for Medical Research and Development (AMED) for the project entitled “Deciphering synergistic interactions between HIV and EBV in lymphomagenesis through genomic and transcriptomic analyses”

A/Prof. Shaheen Mowla was granted an NRF funding award under the category “Competitive Programme for Rated Researchers” for the project entitled “Oncogenic effects of HIV-1 Tat – modulation of cellular microRNAs”

Dr. Brigid McMillan (pictured right) was awarded the DKMS Special grant for her PhD research entitled ‘Mapping Haematopoietic Stem Cell Transplant services in South Africa’.





A/Prof. Estelle Verburgh and Prof. Jeanette Parkes were awarded a Faculty of Health Sciences Cancer Research Initiative Grant for their project entitled 'Development of a liquid biopsy repository linked to a clinical database in lymphoma and cancer of the breast.' In collaboration with A/Prof. Jessica Opie, A/Prof. Shaheen Mowla, and other scientists and clinicians, the project will work to develop a clinically-linked cancer biorepository. This platform will enable research into the use of cell-free DNA for more effective diagnostic, prognostic and disease-monitoring techniques as well as many future local and international research collaborations!



The first meeting of the Cancer Research Initiative (CRI) award recipients are pictured above (left to right): Dr. David Richardson, A/Prof. Willem Stassen, Prof. Jennifer Moodley, Prof. Sharon Prince, A/Prof. Estelle Verburgh, Prof. Jeannette Parkes, and Dr. Brendon Price.

Dr. David Richardson was awarded the South African Medical Research Council Clinician-Researcher PhD Fellowship for his project entitled 'Advancing diagnostic pathways in lymphoma to improve patient outcomes'.

Dr. Siphiwe Baloyi was promoted to Clinical Haematology Consultant.

## Graduation and exam news

The Haematology team would like to congratulate the following students who have passed their college exams with the CMSA or obtained a research degree at UCT:

FC Path (SA) Haem Part II

Dr. Victoria Parker (photograph, right)

Dr. Marcel du Toit (photograph, left)



MMed.

Dr. Victoria Parker obtained her MMed (Haem) degree with distinction at UCT for her study titled 'Effects of sample handling on the detection of key molecular markers in myeloid neoplasms' under the supervision of A/Prof. Karen Shires (primary supervisor) and Dr. Daleen Kriel (co-supervisor).

Dr. Camagu Potelwa obtained his MMed (Med) degree at UCT for his study titled 'The diagnostic pathway to surgical lymph node excision biopsy service in an HIV and TB endemic region in a Western Cape Tertiary Institution' under the supervision of A/Prof. Estelle Verburgh (primary supervisor) and Dr. Francois Malherbe (co-supervisor).

M.Sc.

Lincoln Makofane obtained his M.Sc. (Haematology) in the Department of Pathology at UCT with distinction under the supervision of A/Prof. Shaheen Mowla (primary supervisor) and Dr. Beatrice Ramorola (co-supervisor). His research project is entitled 'An investigation of the impact of the B cell lymphoma factor Activation Induced Cytidine Deaminase (AICDA/AID) on epigenetic plasticity'.

## PhD

Dr. Zahra Latib (photo below, left) graduated and received her PhD with UCT under the supervision of A/Prof Shaheen Mowla (Primary supervisor; photo below, right), A/Prof. Estelle Verburgh and Dr. Dharshnee Chetty (co-supervisors). The research project is entitled 'Programmed cell death-ligand 1 (PD-L1) expression in HIV-associated Diffuse Large B-cell Lymphoma – role and regulation'.







## Publication list December 2024 to June 2025

- Mapimhidze D, Bailly J, Brown K, Bailey J and Verburgh E. Response and remission after first-line corticosteroid therapy in primary immune thrombocytopenia. *S Afr Med J*. 2025;115(2):e2191. <https://doi.org/10.7196/SAMJ.2025.v115i2.2191>
- Qiao J, Bailly J, Opie J. "Key Issues at the Forefront of Diagnosis and Testing for Antiphospholipid Syndrome." *Clinical and Applied Thrombosis/Hemostasis* 30 (2024): 10760296241306751. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10760296241306751>
- Richardson D, Brown K, Rusch J, Verburgh E, Louw V, Opie J. "From the marrow to the blood: optimising the diagnosis of iron deficiency in the setting of inflammation." *Pathology* 57, no. 1 (2025): 87-93. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pathol.2024.06.015>
- Opie J, Mohamed Z, Chetty D, Bailey J, Brown K, Verburgh E, Hardie D. "Hodgkin lymphoma: the role of EBV plasma viral load testing in an HIV-endemic setting." *Clinical and Experimental Medicine* 25, no. 1 (2025): 1-7. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11599344/>
- Hodgkinson K, Willem P, Moodley M, Engelbrecht D, Patel P, Wiggill T, Ketseoglou I, Opie J et al. "The genetic landscape of acute myeloid leukaemia in the South African public sector." *South African Journal of Oncology* 8 (2024): 10. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajo.v8i0.309>
- Twumasi Aboagye E, Adadey SM, Alves de Souza Rios L, Esoh KK, Wonkam-Tingang E, Xhakaza L, De Kock C, Schrauwen I, Amenga-Etego L, Lang D, Awandare GA, Leal SM, Mowla S, Wonkam A. Bi-Allelic MARVELD2 Variant Identified with Exome Sequencing in a Consanguineous Multiplex Ghanaian Family Segregating Non-Syndromic Hearing Loss. *Int J Mol Sci*. 2025 Apr 3;26(7):3337. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijms26073337>
- De John K, Opie J, Louw V, Kriel M. Bone marrow *Emergomyces* and *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* in the setting of advanced human immunodeficiency virus. *Br J Haematol*. 2025 Apr 30. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 40302493. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjh.20095>

- Adams EC, Antel K, Bailey JL, Brown KL, Chetty DR, Richardson D, Verburgh E. Diagnostic use of abdominal ultrasound in detecting extrapulmonary tuberculosis or lymphoma in an HIV-endemic region. *S Afr J HIV Med.* 2025;26(1), a1679. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhivmed.v26i1.1679>
- Han JX, Koh MJ, Boussi L, Sorial M, McCabe SM, et al. [Verburgh E 54th author]. Global outcomes and prognosis for relapsed/refractory mature T-cell and NK-cell lymphomas: results from the PETAL consortium. *Blood Adv.* 2025 Feb 11;9(3):583-602. <https://doi.org/10.1182/bloodadvances.2024014674>
- Sorial MN, Han JX, Koh MJ, Boussi L, Li S, [Verburgh E 62nd author]. Forecasting optimal treatments in relapsed/refractory mature T- and NK-cell lymphomas: A global PETAL Consortium study. *Br J Haematol.* 2025 May 1. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjh.20063>
- Nelson RR, Louw VJ, Curtis B, Peter J. Successful rechallenge of rifabutin in rifampicin-induced thrombocytopenia during TB treatment. *Int J Tuberc Lung Dis.* 2025 Mar 31;29(4):184-185. PMID: 40155784. <https://doi.org/10.5588/ijtld.24.0508>
- Kim K, Verburgh E, Mitina T, Chen W, Yeh SP, et al. Treatment pathways and clinical outcomes in newly diagnosed multiple myeloma outside Europe and North America: The INTEGRATE study. *Int J Hematol.* 2025 Apr 15. Epub ahead of print. Erratum in: *Int J Hematol.* 2025 May 20. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12185-025-03972-8>
- van Leeuwen LPM, du Toit J, McMillan B, Tadzimirwa GY, Oosthuizen J, Brown K, et al. [Verburgh E. 15th author]. Bloodstream Infections and Colonization in Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplant Recipients at a South African Center: A Retrospective Analysis. *Transplant Cell Ther.* 2025 Apr;31(4):269.e1-269.e13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtct.2025.02.010>





PLEASE SEND ANY HAEMATOLOGY-RELATED NEWS, EVENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS, AND PUBLICATIONS FOR THE PERIOD JULY TO DECEMBER 2025 TO HAEMATOLOGY NEWS UCT AT [haematologynews-group@uct.ac.za](mailto:haematologynews-group@uct.ac.za)

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HAEMATOLOGY AT UCT, PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT <https://health.uct.ac.za/haematology>.

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