

New Professor of Medicine Appointed

Associate Professor Vanessa Burch has been appointed as the new Professor of Clinical Medicine with effect from 1 March 2008.

According to department head, Professor Bongani Mayosi, "This is an historic achievement for gender equity in the university".

Professor Burch becomes the first woman to be appointed to an established Chair in the 87 year history of the Department of Medicine (and probably the Medical school).



Professor Mayosi goes on to say that "The decision is also significant for the appointment of an educational scholar to this position". Professor Burch is a past recipient of the Distinguished Teachers Award.

International Partnership to fight TB

Dr Marcos Espinal, Executive Secretary of the Stop TB Partnership, toured the primary field site and laboratory facilities of the South African Tuberculosis Vaccine Initiative (SATVI) of the University of Cape Town on 4 and 5 February 2008. He interacted with researchers and clinical trial volunteers at SATVI's tuberculosis (TB) vaccine research site in Worcester, the most advanced TB vaccine study site in the world.

"The work being conducted by SATVI to develop a new vaccine for tuberculosis is a model for researchers globally", Dr Espinal said. "Finding a new TB vaccine is critical to ending the tuberculosis pandemic in South Africa and around the world".

Hosted by SATVI Director Professor Gregory Hussey, Dr Espinal was accompanied by Dr Jerald Sadoff, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Aeras Global TB Vaccine Foundation, a non-profit developer of TB vaccines based in the United States. SATVI is working in close partnership with Aeras to conduct clinical trials of new vaccines for tuberculosis.

"An African-led response to tuberculosis is a critical component in the fight to curb the pandemic", Professor Hussey said. "This is especially significant, as vaccine research is being done in an area where TB is rampant and within a developing country context. Importantly, SATVI enjoys a healthy partnership with the Department of Health, non-governmental organisations and the community. This is key to the smooth implementation of our studies".

The search for new effective TB vaccines, safe for use by all, is driven by the continuing growth of TB as a major health threat worldwide – an estimated two billion people are infected with TB, and it takes the lives of more than 1.6 million people per year.

"Partnership is a fundamental element of the Aeras approach to vaccine development", Dr Sadoff said. "We

are pleased to be working with SATVI to conduct clinical trials and with the Stop TB Partnership to raise awareness and support for the need for new tools in our fight against tuberculosis".

Following the site tour, Dr Espinal addressed a symposium at the Institute of Infectious Diseases and Molecular Medicine of UCT, where SATVI is located. He was joined on the panel by Dr Jerald Sadoff; Dr K Vallabhjee from the Department of Health; and Associate Professor Willem Hanekom and Dr Hassan Mahomed of SATVI.

[Linda Rhoda]



Professor Gregory Hussey with Dr Marcos Espinal (centre) and Dr Jerry Sadoff (right), at the signpost to the Worcester Project Site at Brewwelskloof Hospital.

International Award

PhD student, Dr Virginia Davids, has just returned from the Society for Free Radical Research Conference in New Delhi, India where she won the Best Oral Presentation award for her doctoral research entitled: "Comparative Red Cell Biochemistry Reveals Novel Antioxidant Strategies and Potential Biomarkers of Oxidative Stress". She is co-supervised by Professors Eric Harley and Arieh Katz.

Congratulations, Virginia!

DEAN'S CORNER

Winds of good fortune are blowing through the Faculty, with the award of large grants and initiation of new projects in Departments across the campus. We take great pride in these achievements – often hard won in the face of international competition – and congratulate those who put many hours, days and nights into the ground work.

But with new projects come more people, and more people need space, bandwidth, administrative support and much, much more to be effective. This reality will demand careful consideration of issues of shape and size; of core versus project activities; of resource allocation;

and especially of space. Our campus is bursting at the seams, with undergraduate student groups vying for teaching rooms, a situation which is aggravated by the planned load shedding in the coming months.

So – over the next few weeks, our planning will focus on shape, size and resource allocation, and your involvement in the process will be crucial.

Up on the hill, at Bremner, there are also winds of change as the executive undergoes refashioning. Professor de la Rey has resigned her position as Deputy Vice-Chancellor to take up the post of executive director of the Council

for Higher Education at the beginning of May. Professor Martin Hall has been charged with executive responsibility for our Faculty and Professor Danie Visser from the Faculty of Law is acting DVC for research, a post he will hold until the new Vice Chancellor makes a permanent appointment later.

In the past four years, Professor de la Rey has held executive oversight for our Faculty and provided support through some very tough challenges. We thank her for her leadership and commitment to our many causes and we extend our very good wishes to her.

Publication of the Month

Last year our Faculty graduated the first MBChB class who had followed the new curriculum. This has provided us with a unique opportunity to see what impact the curriculum has had on various aspects of the student experience:

Burch VC, Sikakana CN, Yeld N, Seggie JL, Schmidt HG, "Performance of academically at-risk medical students in a problem-based learning programme: a preliminary report", *Advances in Health Sciences Education. Theory and Practice*, 12(3): 345-358, 2007

Students entering university from suboptimal circumstances are at significant risk of demonstrating poor academic performance. The Academic Development Programme (ADP) was implemented at UCT in 1991, and over the past decade the programme has graduated more than 100 students.

Upon implementation of the new problem-based learning (PBL) programme in 2002, the ADP was discontinued and all students were entered directly into the new PBL programme. A total of 239 academically at-risk students in

the ADP (1991-2000) and 43 at-risk students in the new PBL programme were studied. The median retention rates for at-risk students in the PBL programme were significantly better than for at-risk students in the ADP ($p < 0.02$).

Performance of the at-risk students in all the fourth year clinical clerkship courses of the PBL programme was significantly better than the mean performance over 10 years for at-risk students in the same fourth year courses in the ADP, demonstrating that the introduction of PBL has not had a deleterious effect.

Global Health

In his valedictory lecture on 13 February, Professor Solly Benatar stated that the health of whole populations — in South Africa and globally — is *the* major crisis for humanity in the 21st century.

While exponential population growth and consumption of the Earth's resources were highlighted as major factors, Benatar also provided a roadmap for avoiding the abyss. Among the guests at this event, was Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu.



Monthly Quiz

We recently had a Nobel Laureate give a lecture in the Faculty. Who was this, what did he win his Prize for, and what did he speak about at the student learning centre? Send your answers to: kit.vaughan@uct.ac.za

Answer to last month's quiz: The foundation stone for the new Groote Schuur Hospital was laid on 5 September 1983 and the Chief Medical Superintendent was Dr Hannah Reeve Sanders. James Irlam was the winner of a R100 book voucher.

And now a *mea culpa*. The answer to January's quiz was 5 (and not 2) medical doctors elected to the NEC. I overlooked Zweli Mkhize, Aaron Motsoaledi and Joe Phaahla, all graduates of the University of Natal. Thanks to Dhiren Govender for the correction!

Lafras Marais Steyn

Lafras Steyn died on Monday 4th February 2008 after a long and debilitating illness, leaving behind him the deep footprints of a leader, scientist, and a man of great stature and integrity.

He was born on the 5 September 1951, the third child of Marais and Susan Steyn, his brother being Martinus, and his sisters Melanie and Melissa. Having matriculated at King Edward School in Johannesburg, where he was Head Prefect, he proceeded to Stellenbosch University where he obtained the BSc (Physiology and Chemistry) and the MBChB degrees. He also distinguished himself in that era by being ejected from a rugby team by Danie Craven, when he attended his sister's wedding instead of playing a match.

Lured across the Liesbeek River by Wieland Gevers and Arderne Forder, he found a home at UCT, where he obtained an honours degree, and then a PhD (Kinetic and Metabolic Studies in HPRT Deficiency), for which he was awarded the Bronte Stewart Research Prize. He joined the Division of Medical Microbiology in 1985, and was promoted, ad hominum, to Associate Professor in 1993. In 1998 he was appointed to the Wernher and Beit Chair in Medical Microbiology, and Head of the Department of Clinical Laboratory Sciences, and subsequently Head of the School of Biomedical Sciences.

During his tenure in Medical Microbiology he innovated and achieved much. One of his first achievements was the implementation of the BSc (Honours) programme in Medical Microbiology, which continues to annually attract a large number of students. In addition, he supervised 13 Doctoral, 6 MSc and 3 MMed students. His main area of research was tuberculosis, and the response of mycobacterium tuberculosis to various stress factors, including heat and cold shock, the object to understand latency of the organism.

His interests and activities extended well beyond the Faculty. He was deeply involved with the newly formed National Health Laboratory Service [NHLS], sitting on their Board, and having a major involvement in drawing up the Umbrella Agreement between Universities and the NHLS wherein he championed the cause of academic medicine. He was passionate about transformation, and brought his belief to practical effect by the guidance and promotion of many transformational candidates. A proud moment for him was being a signatory to the Faculty Charter.



The Faculty was privileged to celebrate his achievements over an illustrious career at a Festschrift on the 28 June 2007, when tribute was paid to his integrity, leadership in faculty affairs, and to his great compassion and strength of character, truly a gentle giant. He leaves his children Tai (Taillefer), Lesca, and Ronan, and their mother Kate. He also leaves his partner, Clare.

[David Dent & Gonda Perez]

Celebration of Research

The 9th Annual Medical Research Day, sponsored by AstraZeneca and involving UCT, US, UWC and the MRC, was hosted by the Faculty on Valentine's Day. Convened by Peter Meissner, there were 30 oral presentations and 27 posters, showcasing some of the outstanding research conducted here in the Western Cape.

The day ended on a highlight with a presentation by Professor Keith Klugman who gave "An update on conjugate Pneumococcal vaccination: implications for both children and adults". As Kit Vaughan, Deputy Dean for Research, remarked, "I was fascinated by your presentation, especially the evidence from those early papers published in 1918-19 and the radical effect that the vaccination programme has had on the health of elderly people in the USA. If we ever needed any evidence that medical science is a fascinating (and exciting!) endeavour, your keynote lecture provided us with that, in spades!"