**RECENT EVENTS**

**VISIT OF PROFESSOR HARALD ZUR HAUSEN, NOBEL PRIZE WINNER 2008**

Professor Harald zur Hausen, Nobel Laureate for 2008 in Medicine or Physiology for his work on human papillomavirus and carcinoma of the cervix, visited Wits from 16 to 18 March 2011. He was accompanied by his wife, Professor Ethel-Michele de Villiers, an eminent virologist in her own right and director of the WHO Reference Centre for papillomaviruses.

Professor zur Hausen delivered three lectures, including a public lecture entitled: “The role of infectious agents in human cancer” which took place at the Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital Auditorium on 17 March 2011. He also contributed to a panel discussion on human papillomavirus mediated disease which was held in the Adler Museum of Medicine. His wife, Professor Ethel-Michele de Villiers delivered a lecture related to TT-virus and its possible association with human disease.

The visit was an outstanding success and received extensive media coverage in the press and on the radio, the effect of which was to highlight Wits and the role that it is playing in human papillomavirus mediated disease.

Numerous people attended the academic programme, not only from the University community, but also from the public, advocacy groups and NGOs associated with healthcare.

An unexpected benefit was the exposure that the University received by providing the community, and in particular women, with a health awareness campaign on cervical cancer and the early detection thereof. Feedback from across the spectrum of those that attended indicated that the visit by Professor zur Hausen and Professor de Villiers was an outstanding success.

Photograph: Professor Loyiso Nongxa, Vice-Chancellor and Principal of Wits, and guests at the dinner hosted in honour of Professor zur Hausen
From 22 to 25 March 2011, the Faculty and the Steve Biko Centre for Bioethics once again hosted Ethics Alive. Ethics Alive 2011 was focused around the central theme of ‘Justice in Health Care’ with numerous presentations, seminars and other events where our guests spoke movingly about the topic at hand.

It was a great honour for the Faculty to host Professor Lawrence Gostin, Director of the O’Neill Institute of Global Health Law at Georgetown University. Professor Gostin joined us as a Distinguished Scholar under the auspices of the Wits Claude Leon Foundation. Professor Gostin spoke passionately about the urgent need for a global framework geared toward implementing justice in health care on an international level. He also addressed large audiences at Chris Hani Baragwanath, Helen Joseph, Sterkfontein and Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospitals. He was joined by Dr Graham Howarth, Head of Medical Services Africa for the Medical Protection Society. Dr Howarth considered whether professionalism is an important trait for health care practitioners who operate in a dysfunctional health care system. Dr Howarth concluded that professionalism is of the utmost importance, especially in a system like South Africa’s.

The main event of Ethics Alive 2011 was a Symposium at which Professor Gostin was joined by Mr Mark Heywood of Section 27 and Professor Judith Bruce, Head of the School of Therapeutic Sciences, as main speakers. An interactive panel discussion (where Dr Imtiaz Sooliman from Gift of the Givers joined the other speakers) followed the presentations and gave the audience a valuable opportunity to put questions to some experts in the fields of justice, ethics, healthcare and human rights.

Other highlights of Ethics Alive 2011 were the Faculty Assembly, where members of the Faculty reaffirmed their commitment to maintaining high standards of professionalism in their practice. Numerous events for undergraduate students were enthusiastically attended and the prizes for undergraduate competitions were awarded at Live@Lunch.

All the activities were well attended and enjoyed by all. Exposure to some truly world-class scholars allowed audiences a rare and valuable opportunity to consider justice in health care from many different perspectives and highlighted the urgency of finding ethically acceptable solutions to the problems faced in the South Africa health care sector.
Following the successful launch of a Rural Careers Day piloted in Mafikeng last year, the Division of Rural Health has incorporated this day as one of its annual activities. Ms Ntsiki Sondzaba, working closely with Dr Claire van Deventer, the District Family Physician in Dr Kenneth Kaunda district and a senior lecturer in the Department of Family Medicine, invited Grade 10-12 learners from local high schools through the office of the District Executive Manager: Department of Education in the district.

The event was held in the Community Hall of the Matlosana Sub-district in Jouberton near Klerksdorp. Professor Ian Couper welcomed the 200+ attendees, the majority of whom were grade 10-12 learners who came along with their life orientation teachers. About 20% of the attendees were young people who completed their matriculation last year and who were eager to get information on funded careers as many could not pursue their tertiary studies due to funding constraints.

There were 25 volunteers from Wits, amongst them final year medical students based locally and in North West as part of IPC Block, postgraduate students from physiology, two WIRHE BSc Physiotherapy and BSc Pharmacy graduates, members of the Wits Rural Health Club, and other senior students representing other major disciplines.

Michelle Robinson, MSc Molecular Medicine Student, writes: ‘Although most people had never heard of Molecular Medicine, they were interested to learn about it. I thought the learners were a great bunch, they listened attentively, asked intelligent questions, and were diligent in trying to find out about the courses on offer. Most people had questions about costs/bursaries/financial aid options.’

Learners moved through 12 stations; 7 focused on careers: Medicine, OT, physiotherapy, pharmacy, clinical associates, physiology, dentistry, molecular medicine, BHS, nursing (manned by the local college), emergency medicine (manned by local paramedics) and the South African National Blood Transfusion Services, while 3 focused on health promotion: STI/HIV, substance abuse and teenage pregnancy.

Isaac Mafisa, Zone Donor Services Manager, Vaal Zone, South African National Blood Service, writes: ‘The students got to know a little more about SANBS, our activities and careers within our organization. The day was highlighted by a successful blood collection drive, where we procured 21 units of blood and created a lot of awareness to the students and teachers. Once again many thanks to you and your team, and hope this is the beginning of future successful partnerships.’

The Schools Liaison Office was represented by Ms Jeanette Phiri and Ms Megan Moodley who handed out information brochures to teachers and promotional material to learners and answered questions on available funding opportunities.

Preliminary evaluation feedback suggests high levels of satisfaction from the majority of the respondents.

The Division of Rural Health is once again grateful to the Deanery and the respective Heads of Departments for their ongoing support.
The thirty seventh annual prize giving ceremony took place on 30 March 2011. The awards pay tribute to the academic achievements of students and staff in the areas of research, learning and teaching. Guest speaker was Professor Shabir Madhi who delivered an interesting and challenging address.

The Faculty Research Prize was won by Dr Alexio Capovilla for his publication: 'Stabilisation of HIV-1 gp120-CD4 Receptor Complex Through Targeted Interchain Disulfide Exchange', published in the *Journal of Biological Chemistry* (Vol. 285 No.33, pp. 25743–25752, August 13, 2010). The work describes a novel biochemical concept for stabilising the interaction between the HIV-1 receptor molecule (gp120) and recombinant forms of its host cell receptor (CD4), which we are using to design new HIV-1 therapies and vaccine immunogens. This is the most prestigious prize offered by the Faculty of Health Sciences and is awarded in recognition of excellence in research.

Alexio was educated at King Edward VII School, and received a BSc (Hons) and PhD from Wits. He is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Molecular Medicine and Haematology, and Co-Director of the HIV Pathogenesis Research Laboratory (HPRL) with Dr Maria Papathanasopoulos.

Alexio says: ‘My group is broadly interested in the mechanism by which HIV attaches to, and enters, host cells. Specifically we use molecular and biophysical approaches to characterise the interactions between components of the machinery (Envelope proteins gp120 and gp41) that HIV uses to gain entry to CD4-positive cells, and we try to use this data to engineer novel therapeutic ligands (compounds that bind the viral receptor protein and antagonise its function).’

The Phillip V Tobias Medal and Convocation Distinguished Teacher’s Awards for the most distinguished clinical teaching and for distinction in teaching basic sciences in the Faculty were awarded to Dr J Naicker (Pre-clinical teaching) and jointly to Professors VA Davies and PC Modi (Clinical teaching).
The handover event of the Discovery Award was held on 5 April 2011, at the Lehurutshe District Training Centre. Representatives gathered to celebrate the grant that was awarded to the Lehurutshe Project and will be used to improve the facilities used by staff, students and visitors to the site. In addition Discovery handed over 4 water coolers as a symbolic gift to Project Manager, Ms Abigail Dreyer to mark Discovery’s grant to the Project.

Speeches were made by the Ngaka Modiri Molema District, Chief Director of Hospital Services, Mr Henning, who recapped the history of the District Training Centre, acknowledging the Wits Centre for Rural Health for its contribution to the vision of training not only Clinical Associates but also doctors and nurses to improve skills and therefore service delivery to the rural communities of the Ngaka Modiri Molema District.

Director for the Centre for Rural Health, Professor Ian Couper, spoke of his recent visit to the Philippines and drew some parallels to the programmes offered abroad. He highlighted how medical training is structured with a far greater emphasis on service repayment than in South Africa and how despite this medical staff stay in the Philippines and don’t leave for other countries once qualified.

Ms Ruth Lewin, the Head of Corporate Sustainability, outlined the various types of grants that Discovery makes to various organisations. She stressed that grants were to improve access to health and not spend funds as a short fix to organisations trying to bring about change and development. In the past this was done by sponsoring events like golf days. She spoke of her excitement of working with the Centre for Rural Health and expressed her belief that the project would be very successful.

Guest were then treated to a braai in the courtyard of the Nurses Home where the Clinical Associate students stay during their training at the hospital for rotations of 8 weeks long. The current Clinical Associates students are in their second year. The site plans to have international students completing their Integrated Primary Care rotation.

Photographs: (Above): Ruth Lewin, Sandhya Vedalankar (both Discovery Corporate Social Investment) and Abigail Dreyer, Centre for Rural Health; (Below): Second Year Clinical Associates students with Professor Couper, Mr Henning, Ruth Lewin, Sandhya Vedalankar, Mr Jackie Tau (Aspen Pharmacare), Gaolatlhe Mothoagae (Wits), Dr Audrey Gibbs (Clinical Associates Co-ordinator), Mr Aubrey Chabedi (Director: MEC Support) and Mr Sefiso Molusiwa (Assistant Director: MEC Support)

Rural Health Advocacy Project (RHAP) convened a consultative workshop at Wits Medical School on 10 February 2011. The event was well attended by over 55 stakeholders from national and provincial departments of health, rural health care workers of different disciplines, professional associations, academics, research and human rights organisations. The main objectives of this event were to: Present and discuss RHAP’s longer term RHAP strategy 2011-2014: “Connecting Practice, Policy and Partners”; Present
and strengthen the RHAP Position Paper on Rural Health Care by obtaining inputs from key stakeholders; and Exchange knowledge, views, and build relations around rural health advocacy. The keynote address was delivered by Dr Mmabatho Kekana, clinical manager at Hlabisa Hospital in KZN and RuDASA Rural Doctor of the Year 2010. Her presentation addressed challenges, successes and strategies in improving health outcomes and HR recruitment and retention. Dr Jane Goudge from the Centre for Health Policy presented on research measuring the costs of seeking health care for two poor rural communities in Mpumalanga Province. Mr Elroy Paulus from Black Sash shared recent findings of a consultative process with communities in five provinces regarding access and quality of health care, with the aim of informing the planned National Health Insurance. The RHAP presented its draft position paper and advocacy framework, which were both well received and supported.

The RHAP is a partnership between Wits Centre for Rural Health, the Rural Doctors Association of Southern Africa and SECTION27, incorporating the AIDS Law Project.

For more information and to download the position paper go to www.rhap.org.za or contact Marije at marije@rhap.org.za.

NEW MEDICAL STUDENTS’ COUNCIL 2011/12

We welcome the new Medical Students’ Council for 2011: Edward Naicker (Secretary), Dakalo Mufamadi (Events, Arts and Culture), Abigail Keene (President), Tatolo Bobo Vice President and Academic), Keith Cousins (Treasurer and Sport) and Sherwin Prim (Academic and Publicity).

Chatting to President Abigail Keene, we established that the cornerstone of their mission this year is to represent the students who elected them to office to the best of their abilities. She says: ‘We wish to be transparent in our dealings with Faculty and uphold the pillar of accountability. We shall strive to be accountable for all our actions and hope that those actions best serve the students.

The Council endeavours to be a platform for all students to reach Faculty and beyond. We want to be the platform for students to achieve better marks, higher accolades and a better quality student life. We undertake the task of being the link between Faculty and students with the aim of improving communication between them in order to better the academic and administrative processes.

We pledge to serve the student body who elected us into office efficiently and sufficiently, while, at all times, upholding the good name of Wits Medical School. We wish to do both parties an equal service by being honourable, respectable, and gracious ambassadors who Faculty staff and students can be proud to have represent them.

The MSC is responsible for certain annual events such as our sports day, arts competition, trade fair and the MSC charity ball. This year, we aim to make each of these events as fulfilling and splendid as possible whilst introducing a number of new events to the almanac, including a medic’s comedy night.

The MSC is among the oldest councils at Wits, and we strive to uphold and honour that prestige by applying it to all of the tasks in which we involve ourselves.”

We wish Abi and her team an enjoyable and productive year ahead!
Caryn (Caz) McNamara writes: ‘Nobel Laureate, Dr Sydney Brenner, recently hosted a group of dynamic individuals from Wits to meet with him at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS) in the Western Cape. The Wits delegation consisted of seven young scientists, the two staff of the SBIBM, and the Senior Advisor to the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Belinda Bozzoli.

The first aim was to speak to and inspire young upcoming scientists in their respective research fields. Projects discussed ranged from basic evolutionary biology, gene therapy, high-throughput genomic science, and the molecular and immunological aspects of HIV and TB infections. The time that our scientists spent with Dr Brenner was invaluable in providing feedback on their current and future research projects. All of the scientists commented positively on the experience with Dr Brenner, but also with regard to meeting other young scientists within similar research fields who they had not met before on campus.

The second aim was to discuss the strategic planning for the soon-to-be-established Sydney Brenner Institute for Molecular Bioscience (SBIBM) at Wits, to which Dr Brenner has lent his name. Wits understands that its future lies in strengthening its inter-disciplinary and collaborative research and is committed to doing so. As a result of this commitment, Wits is currently undertaking an initiative to set up six similar institutes across various disciplines and faculties.’

Dr Sydney Brenner is a Wits Medical School alumnus. He won the Nobel Prize in Physiology/Medicine in 2002 for his research contribution to the understanding molecular and developmental biology since the 1960s. For further information, Caryn can be contacted on sbimb@wits.ac.za

IN MEMORIAM

EMERITUS PROFESSOR JOHN HANSEN (1920-2011)

The Faculty mourns the death of Emeritus Professor John Derek Lindsell Hansen [MBChB, UCT, 1943; Diploma of Child Health, RCP, London, 1946; MRCP, London (1948); MD, UCT (1960); FRCP (1968)], who died on Sunday 10 April 2011.

John was Academic Head at Wits and Clinical Head of Paediatrics at the Johannesburg Hospital from 1971 to 1985. He joined from UCT and energetically navigated the Department into previously uncharted waters. JDL, as he was known, oversaw the establishment of Paediatrics and Child Health as a major discipline at the University, led the charge in the development of staff as clinician scientists with PhDs, and played a major role in integrating the paediatric entities at the four teaching hospitals. Under his guidance and as a result of key and visionary appointments, paediatric haematology and oncology, and nutrition and metabolism developed and thrived in Johannesburg, adding lustre to Wits and Baragwanath Hospital where these disciplines were based.

John was always humble and unassuming but fought tenaciously for the discipline and his colleagues. He will be remembered by all who worked with and for him as a friend, guide, mentor and worthy role model. He was awarded honorary DSc degrees by UCT (1992) and Wits (1997).

The Faculty of Health Sciences extends its sincere condolences to John’s family.
The MRC/Wits Rural Public Health and Health Transitions Research Unit team (Agincourt) sadly announces the untimely passing away of their colleague Dr Victor Mung’ala Odera on 9 April 2011.

Originally from Kakamega, Kenya, Victor was born on 14 September 1967. He received a BA, majoring in Economics and Sociology from the University of Nairobi in 1991, and an MA in Population Studies from the University of Ghana in 1995. In 2006 he was awarded a PhD from the University of Amsterdam – the title of his thesis was Neurological disability and impairment in children: Prevalence and risk factors. He highlighted the burden of the neurocognitive sequelae following falciparum malaria and more recently was involved in epidemiology of neurological impairment in Africa.

Victor joined the team of the MRC/Wits–Agincourt Unit, School of Public Health, as a demographer, on 1 March 2010. He had previously worked for 18 years at the Kenya Medical Research Institute-Wellcome Trust Research Programme, where he helped set up the first demographic surveillance site in Kilifi, Eastern Kenya. His work there focused on filling a continuing gap through epidemiological studies of epilepsy and mental health. He was a founding member of the KEMRI football team in the 1990s, managed the team in 2000s, and was responsible for getting the team into the local league.

Part of his interest in relocating to South Africa and the Agincourt Unit was to strengthen his demographic skills and build a demographic research programme. At the time of his sudden hospitalisation he was due to attend a workshop on measuring maternal mortality in Mwanza, Tanzania, as well as preparing for the 2011 Agincourt census update. He would have executed this admirably having led census field activities during the previous year.

Victor was a warm, friendly and generous colleague who added greatly to the team working in Bushbuckridge. Although living in rural South Africa for only one year, he quickly established easy working relationships with local field supervisors and their field teams.

Victor is survived by his wife, Jennifer and two children, Alexa Andai, 8 years old and Shaquille Kusimba, 16 years old. Victor will be sorely missed by his colleagues in South Africa. The School of Public Health and Faculty of Health Sciences extend heartfelt condolences to his family.
We are saddened to report the death of Professor William Harding le Riche (born Dewetsdorp, South Africa, 21 March 1916, died Sunnybrook Hospital, Toronto, 31 December 2010). This obituary was received from his daughter, Jenny le Riche:

Professor le Riche earned BSc, MBBCh and MD degrees at Wits (1936-1949), holding a Carnegie Research Grant, Bureau for Education and Social Research, Pretoria 1937-1939. He was appointed by the Union Health Department to Health Centre Service first at Polela, Natal and later (1945) established the first non-segregated Health Centre at Knysna, South Africa. While on a Rockefeller fellowship he graduated with a Master of Public Health (cum laude) from Harvard in 1950.

In 1952, he went to Canada, working first at the Department of National Health and Welfare in Ottawa and then at Physicians Services Incorporated in Toronto. In 1959 he joined the University of Toronto, where he later became Professor and Head of Department of Epidemiology and a Professor in the Department of Preventive Medicine, becoming Professor Emeritus after retirement in 1984. He was awarded the Defries Medal for his work in Public Health and granted Honorary Membership of the Canadian Public Health Association. For many years he worked as a general practitioner privately and then at Sunnybrook Hospital.

His long time interest in evolution began in 1936 when he and Dr G Schepers took the paleontologist, Doctor Robert Broom, to the Sterkfontein caves, South Africa, where Broom made important discoveries of Australopithecus africanus. Other career interests included hospital infections, nutrition, preventive medicine, tropical medicine, international health and environmental degradation.

In his long retirement he continued to make new friends and engage all who liked to debate a wide range of subjects, as well as enjoying theatre, music and church activities with his wife of 67 years, Margaret. An inveterate letter writer, he corresponded globally with family, friends, associates and publications. Because of an undulled appetite for learning, his agile mind and keen sense of humour never failed to amuse. His passionate intensity, adventurous intellect, and steadfast love will be missed by all.

Editors’ note: The School of Public Health has a medal: the W Harding de Riche Medal in Epidemiology, established in 1983, which is awarded to a postgraduate student in the School for a research project in epidemiology.

INVITATIONS

The Wits Faculty of Health Sciences Research Office invites you to the fifth lecture in the Prestigious Research Lecture Series

Fighting the shadow – pneumococcus and respiratory disease in the 21st century

Professor Charles Feldman (Professor of Pulmonology and Chief Physician, Head, Pulmonology Division, Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital and Wits University) &

Professor Shabir Madhi (Professor of Vaccinology, Wits University; DST/NRF South African Research Initiative Chair: Vaccine Preventable Diseases)

Date: Wednesday 25 May, 2011
Time: 17:00 for 17:30
Venue: Johannesburg Hospital Auditorium, Wits Medical School, Parktown, Johannesburg

RSVP: Nomfundo Sibiya (Nomfundo.sibiya@wits.ac.za or 011 717 2305) by 18 May 2011
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Early Bird Registration Closes: 16 May 2011
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Tel: +27 (0)18 299 2236
E-mail: 11102039@nwu.ac.za

Invited Speakers:
• Dr. Charles Boelen
• Dr. Jack Boulet
• Prof. Robin Watts
• Dr. David CM Taylor
• Prof. Clas Wilders
• Prof. Debbie Murdoch-Eaton

Register Online: www.saahe2011.co.za
And finally …

Does this remind you of anything? At all?

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**NEXT ISSUE OF HEALTH SCIENCES REVIEW: FRIDAY 13 MAY 2011**

**PLEASE SUBMIT NEWS AND PICTURES BY 11 MAY 2011 to**

Adler.museum@wits.ac.za or Rochelle.keene@wits.ac.za