Communication and Marketing Department
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso
Kommunikasie en Bemarkingsdepartement

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
Welgelegen House, Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank, Cape Town
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 5427/5428/5674 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 5628

www.uct.ac.za

26 July 2018

UCT researchers pioneering research into hearing impairments in sub-Saharan Africa

University of Cape Town (UCT) academics in partnership with their counterparts in Cameroon, Ghana and Mali are working on genomic research which aims to find the genes that cause hearing impairment in people from Africa and to better understand how these genes affect hearing in African populations.

Professor Ambroise Wonkam, professor of medical genetics and deputy dean for research in the Faculty of Health Sciences, said: “Six out of every 1 000 children in Africa are born deaf, this is six times more than the United States”.

“In half of these children, it is due to a genetic origin and this is a major challenge. We are dealing with truly translational research. UCT is very privileged to have the kind of infrastructure that is able to drive this kind of pan-African research.”

The Hearing Impairment Genetic Studies in Africa (HI-GENES Africa) study is important as it will help to improve the genetic screening and counselling, and in some cases prediction of cochlear treatments in sub-Saharan Africans, African-Americans and Hispanic Americans of African descent.

The project is studying the *Whole Genome Sequencing* of a group of sub-Saharan Africans from Cameroon, Mali, Ghana and South Africa with familial hearing impairment, to identify new genes and mutations, to better understand the genetic cause of non-syndromic hearing impairment in African populations.

Globally an effort is being made to understand the genomic science behind health and disease in various populations to better identify those who are at risk. This diagnosis has the potential to develop new drugs and personal medicines. Although this is a global effort, research in African countries has been slow, contributing to the inequality in health and well-being that is already present.

HI-GENES Africa forms part of the Human Hereditary and Health in Africa (H3Africa) consortium which aims to facilitate a research approach to the study of genomics and environmental determinants of common diseases in order to positively impact the health of African populations. It also aims to contribute to the development of African scientists and networks on the continent.

H3Africa was launched in 2010 in response to the challenge of health risk identification within African populations. It is supported by the National Institute of Health Director's Common Fund as an initiative within its Global Health Program and by the Wellcome Trust, through the African Academy of Sciences, as part of their continuing research portfolio in Africa.

Earlier this year H3Africa published a guide for the ethical handling of genomic research and biobanking in Africa which aims to empower African researchers and communities to have greater control over their data.

Learn more about the H3Africa and HI-GENES Africa

ENDS

Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

Aamirah Sonday
Media Liaison and Monitoring Officer
Communication and Marketing Department
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch
Tel: (021) 650 5427
Cell: (076) 947 6071
Email: aamirah.sonday@uct.ac.za
Website: www.uct.ac.za