



Communication and Marketing Department
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso
Kommunikasie en Bemakingsdepartement

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

27 August 2025

UCT alumna earns masters degree in six months



Dr Aayesha J Soni

Photo: Supplied

As the sun sets on the month that honours women whose work redefines excellence and expands the frontiers of possibility, the spotlight falls on University of Cape Town's (UCT) alumna, Dr Aayesha J Soni, the first female internationally trained sub-specialist in adult epileptology.

Soni is an adult neurologist and epileptologist. Her clinical focus is epilepsy surgery, with expertise in stereo-electroencephalography (stereo-EEG) and neuromodulation techniques such as Vagus Nerve Stimulation (VNS) and Deep Brain Stimulation (DBS). Soni's journey reflects the transformative power of resilience and unwavering commitment to patient care.

Journey through UCT

Soni acknowledges the role her parents played throughout her journey. She believes she would not be where she is today without her mother, whose sacrifices have been tremendous. Her mother once shared that both of her daughters' great-grandmothers were illiterate, yet three generations later, the family has progressed remarkably.

As a student, Soni told her mother she wanted to give up on something related to school. Her mother looked at her and said: "You know, Aayesha, I have never thought of you as the person to give up." These are the words that echo in Soni's mind when she thinks of giving up.

Growing up in Johannesburg, colleagues discouraged her from applying to UCT due to its competitive nature. She eventually decided to apply and was accepted. Being at UCT proved to be a remarkable opportunity. Motivated by a commitment to make a positive impact in adult epileptology, Soni believes neurology chose her.

Soni navigated challenges she experienced with determination, turning obstacles into stepping stones. While most complete a master's degree in four years, Soni earned hers in just six months, and her groundbreaking thesis research was swiftly translated into clinical practice.

She spearheaded the establishment of the first epilepsy surgery service in a public hospital in South Africa.

Describing her experience at the university, Soni said: "UCT is the best. You can go there and accomplish things that you are unable to achieve elsewhere, as it is an environment which recognises potential and creates opportunities."

Soni dreams of a future where she continues to build strong affiliations with Groote Schuur Hospital and UCT. With a deep passion for clinical research, she is committed to putting South African research on the global map.

Her future goals include promoting excellence within the healthcare sector and fostering collaboration between the private and public health systems.

Advice for women aspiring to walk a similar path?

For her, creating opportunities for what you believe in instead of waiting for them to come to you is key. She believes rejection is not a deterrent, but a learning curve. "When you are kinder to yourself, you can pick yourself up after rejections and failure."

Soni encourages women, especially those of colour, to recognise their immense potential, move forward, and claim the opportunities that await them.

She acknowledges that it can be difficult to navigate certain spaces for a woman, even when equipped with the same knowledge as male counterparts. This often requires proving oneself multiple times, and she believes in "being proactive in pursuing one's passions."

Story by Nokulunga Kweyama, UCT News.

Ends

Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

Thami Nkwanyane

Media Liaison and Monitoring Officer

Communication and Marketing Department

University of Cape Town

Rondebosch

Tel: (021) 650 5672

Cell: (072) 563 9500

Email: thami.nkwanyane@uct.ac.za

Website: www.uct.ac.za