

NEWS FROM:



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27 July 2010

New UCT facility makes primary health care more accessible to Cape Flats residents Retreat Student Learning Centre gives vital experience in community work

The University of Cape Town Faculty of Health Sciences has officially launched a new student learning centre in the Cape Flats suburb of Retreat, where students will work and learn in the kinds of health-care conditions they will probably encounter often during their careers.

The new Retreat Student Learning Centre is the second such facility set up by the faculty's Primary Health Care Directorate in communities surrounding Cape Town. It follows the opening of the Vanguard Student Learning Centre in Bonteheuwel, while a third will soon be opened in Hanover Park. UCT students are also placed in Mitchell's Plain and Khayelitsha, although there are no learning centres there yet.

The Retreat centre is modest, with four consultation rooms. A fifth room is furnished as a resource centre, with three PCs. Yet the faculty has lofty ambitions for the facility.

With most training opportunities confined to large hospitals such as Groote Schuur, the faculty has to look elsewhere to provide students with more appropriate clinical training. In such community-based learning centres, they learn not only from their immediate tutors, but also from other staff and patients.

"We need these kinds of learning centres because we cannot train our future health professionals only in hospitals without them being able to work with patients at community level, and with communities around Cape Town and beyond," said Frank Molteno, the clinical-teaching platform co-ordinator at UCT's Primary Health Care Directorate.

"With a health-care system slowly but surely re-organising itself along primary health-care lines, it is vital for students, who are being prepared in the first instance as generalists, to gain experience both in clinical and public health skills, working at a primary level in and with communities -- particularly those less well-served by state and private health-care services."

One tenet of UCT's model of community-based education is that students must be versed in the health needs of entire communities. "We want to make the whole community the venue

of learning, as the equivalent of the lecture venue for pre-clinical students," noted Professor Steve Reid, the director of the Primary Health Care Directorate and the UCT chair in primary health care. "And we want them to be able to work across the whole spectrum of health facilities in the teaching platform, which we are in the process of extending. We sincerely appreciate the contribution of our donors, through SA Medical and Education Foundation, who by their efforts have made the training of our students more appropriate."

The service is also a boon to the community centres that they are based in. "This partnership with UCT is a plus for the Retreat Community Health Centre," said Cyril Jacobs, the chairperson of the Retreat Community Health Committee. "And we really appreciate any investment that can benefit the community."

ENDS

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