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UCT senior researcher intends bringing healing power of stem-cell therapies to ordinary patients

Stem-cell science has vast potential for the treatment of all kinds of diseases. The University of Cape Town senior research scientist and Next Einstein Forum Fellow, Dr Kevin Dzobo, wants to bring the healing power of stem-cell therapies to ordinary patients.

Dr Dzobo is in the Department of Integrative Biomedical Sciences and was recently elected as the vice president of the African Tissue Engineering and Regenerative Medicine International Society.

"When it comes to stem-cell science, we in Africa cannot afford to be left behind, not when stem-cell science has such vast potential for the treatment of all kinds of diseases," Dr Dzobo explained.

Growing up in the 1990s in Mutare, Zimbabwe, Dr Dzobo was surrounded by the ravaging effects of HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria.

He said: "At that time whole families were being wiped out, parents leaving children, the heads of families becoming absent." It was at that time that he knew that one day he wanted to work in the medical field.

In recognition of his strong scientific record and potential for outstanding leadership, he was recently chosen to be a Next Einstein Forum Fellow. His Einstein challenge is to bring stem cell-based treatments to patients.

Dr Dzobo hopes to develop easier and cheaper methods or technologies to stimulate stem cells into tissue-forming cells that can be used to treat several diseases and pathological conditions.

"I would like to see ordinary people in the street start to benefit from these scientific breakthroughs, and I believe that it is possible in the near future," he added.

In treating many different kinds of cancer, doctors often use chemotherapy to target tumours. The problem is that these drugs are often only effective against one or several of the malignant cells that are present in a tumour. Too often what then happens is that the therapy

is either ineffective, or worse, that it in fact allows certain of the malignant cells to grow faster.

The overall objective for Dr Dzobo is to advocate against the main drivers of technological disparities such as the lack of financial support and commitment by African governments for research and development – especially in the fields of tissue engineering and regenerative medicine.

“We are already seeing private enterprise investing in the field to a huge degree. This can lead to the fast-tracking of exciting new discoveries, but we also need to ensure that such knowledge remains in the public realm if it is to make a difference in ordinary people’s lives, Dr Dzobo suggested.

ENDS

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