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Centre has ‘Africanised’ neuroscience - Neuroscience Centre launched at Groote Schuur Hospital

The launch of the University of Cape Town’s (UCT) multidisciplinary Neuroscience Centre, established to execute inter- and cross-disciplinary research and fast-track novel treatment options for neurological disorders, is an important step towards “Africanising” the vital discipline of neuroscience in South Africa.

A first of its kind for the country and the continent, the centre, established in partnership with the Western Cape Provincial Government, is housed at Groote Schuur Hospital (GSH) and aims to strengthen the existing partnership between UCT and GSH. The official launch took place on Tuesday, 10 March.

The facility boasts cutting-edge technology and state-of-the-art facilities and joins scientists and academics in the field of neuroscience to integrate and improve patient care, research, teaching and training, as well as advocacy. It’s been established specifically to address SA’s high burden of disease in mental and neurological disorders.

For UCT Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng, the centre is a dream come true and provides one example of how the university is bringing world-class expertise into Africa, to build local capacity and improve understanding of the human brain.

Professor Phakeng was “encouraged” that the centre adopts a multidisciplinary research and training approach and brings together various expertise in neurosurgery, neurology, psychiatry, imaging, genetics and neuroscience to inform better treatment options for people suffering from neurological disorders in the country and on the continent.

“As a university want to be a leading power for transformation, not just on this continent, but for the world, including the world of neuroscience,” said Professor Phakeng.

Speaking at the launch, MEC for Health in the Western Cape, Dr Nomafrench Mbombo said she is proud that the centre will provide “tangible” work towards decolonising expertise in neuroscience and the country’s healthcare sector.

She added that she was excited to witness the long-term contribution the facility will make to the field, not just in the country, but on the continent and in the world at large.

“We are really proud, and we are excited [about the launch of the centre]. This is a brain gain and it is in Africa. We have Africanised the discipline [of neuroscience],” Mbombo said.

The purpose of the Neuroscience Centre is bring together the clinical and basic neuroscience disciplines by providing opportunities such as:

- Innovative multi-disciplinary clinical services through the Neuroscience Clinical Unit.
- New research facilities that will enable clinicians and basic scientists to work together to research the causes and progression of neurological and mental disorders. The Neuroscience Institute will offer a biobank, research laboratories, neuroimaging and data platform.
- Interactive teaching and training spaces, such as a state-of-the-art auditorium and neurosurgical innovation laboratory that will enable us to train the next generation of clinical neuroscientists.
- A conducive environment that will foster interdisciplinary research that will enable clinicians and scholars from different backgrounds to explore the causes and consequences of nervous system disorders.

The renovation of this facility was made possible through a fundraising campaign led by the UCT leadership and Neuroscience Institute Director, Professor Graham Fieggen. Donations from UCT alumni, philanthropic foundations, UCT and the Western Cape Government have made this 12-year vision a reality.



The Neuroscience Centre represents a high-level partnership between UCT and the Western Cape Government Department of Health. The facility houses UCT’s Neuroscience Institute and is the first of its kind for the country and the continent.

Photo: Lerato Maduna/UCT

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