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Improving universal access to surgical care for patients – meet UCT’s new head of Global Surgery

The thrill and excitement of the labour ward and the pure joy of witnessing a healthy mom receiving a healthy baby led to Associate Professor Salome Maswime, the new head of Global Surgery at the University of Cape Town (UCT), falling in love with the labour ward. But it was also the deep disappointment of losing a new mother that persuaded her that she needed to learn and do more.

Describing global surgery as the interface between clinical disciplines and public health, Associate Professor Maswime says it’s really about improving equity, improving healthcare, ensuring universal surgical access and providing good quality care.

This is particularly relevant in low-resource settings such as South Africa because of the high surgical morbidity and mortality, an unmet need for access to surgical care, high rates of complications, delays in patients receiving care, and differences in the standards of care.

“And so, we’ve got such a high burden of disease and unless we start looking at the why and the how to improve it, we will continue practising medicine the way we have been taught to. But if clinicians and public health specialists start talking to each other, we will find solutions together that are going to improve outcomes. Global surgery is about doing that.”

Associate Professor Maswime, who is also a recipient of the prestigious Discovery Foundation Massachusetts General Hospital Fellowship Award and President of the South African Clinician Scientists’ Society, has an exciting vision for her department.

Her vision is to develop global surgery at UCT into a world-renowned centre for excellence, contribute to changing the way that surgical practice is taught, and train and develop people who are equipped to take this forward across the continent. She also dreams of becoming an A-rated scientist along the way.

After graduating as a specialist obstetrician and gynaecologist from the University of Witwatersrand in 2013, Associate Professor Maswime completed a PhD

investigating caesarean-related morbidity and mortality. "I did a study across 15 hospitals and that is when I really realised how health systems affect surgical outcomes," she says.

She describes herself as creative, hardworking and ambitious.

But she is also a dreamer, who's unafraid of stepping up to challenges and reimagining new ways of delivering patient-centred healthcare, such as the integration of maternal and mental health services. She encourages young people not to conform.

"Find yourself and do what you believe in and what you meant to do."

ENDS



Associate Professor Salome Maswime

Photo: Je'nine May/UCT

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