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UCT's Health Sciences' new leadership team committed to transformation



The team, from left to right: Prof Ambroise Wonkam (deputy dean: research), Dr Kerrin Begg (deputy dean: undergraduate education), Dr Tracey Naledi (deputy dean: health sciences), Assoc Prof Lionel Green-Thompson (dean), Prof Elelwani Ramugondo (deputy dean: postgraduate education) and Nave Naidoo (director: faculty operations).

Photo: Je'nine May

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Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Cape Town (UCT), [Associate Professor Lionel Green-Thompson](#), leads a team which celebrates a diversity of long service

and new blood, rehabilitation and medical professionals as well as demography, all united in the building of a faculty of excellence and transformation, ensuring sustainability.

The leadership team is made up of the dean, four deputy deans and a recently created position, director of faculty operations.

One of the more recent appointments to the deanery is Dr Tracey Naledi, Deputy Dean of Health Sciences who is hoping to contribute to transformation through big ideas and by amplifying the work of students and staff.

Naledi is an alumnus of the university and is currently enrolled as a PhD candidate in the faculty. She has over 20 years' experience in government and NGO sectors and has personal experience of the need for continued transformation in the faculty.

As a medical student in the early 1990s, she found the university an alienating space where she sometimes doubted herself and her abilities. The curriculum and lack of black lecturers made her feel that she didn't belong or was inferior. One of Naledi's commitments to students and staff is that, under her watch, students and staff should not experience the faculty in the same way she did those many years ago.

"We don't want to train people and make them unlearn who they are. When students come to UCT, they must come out of UCT not having been stripped of their culture and beliefs."

"They must come out of UCT being stronger, having understood who they are while learning about other cultures making them better and more complex," she said.

Dr Kerrin Begg is another recent appointment and an alumnus of UCT and the faculty. She graduated in 1994, as part of the first class in the new democracy. More than 20 years later, and after gaining a wealth of experience in the private, public, parastatal and civic sectors, she is the Deputy Dean for Undergraduate Education.

Dr Begg will focus on numerous deliverables during her tenure, including exiting undergraduates who are self-directed, independent and responsive to the needs of the healthcare system and communities; and ensuring curriculum design and delivery that is "relevant to our country, our community, our health system" while also conducting a deeper review of the curriculum.

"We must understand the biases and prejudices that are inherent in our curriculum, in the way that we deliver it so that we actively work towards diversity, inclusion and transformation," said Begg.

Also on her to-do list is measuring delivery on principles of equity, social justice, integrated interprofessional multidisciplinary care, and on a primary healthcare-centred approach; helping educators to grow, thrive and to mitigate exhaustion and prevent burnout.

Another new name in the deanery team – but one that is synonymous with transformation at UCT – is Professor Elelwani Ramugondo who has been appointed as Deputy Dean for Postgraduate Education. She is also a UCT alumnus and brings to her position the experience of having gone through the system herself.

During her term of office, Ramugondo hopes that “we can rise up [and] be able to nurture the high level of talent we can attract to the faculty, and see people thrive, both staff and students”.

Work already underway includes various strategies such as conscientisation on systemic issues, including racism and sexism, through peer-to-peer dialogue; identifying generic postgraduate training needs that can be met outside of the supervisor-student relationship; following best practice approaches to train clinical specialists; clear processes and procedures to address grievances; as well as progressive automation for postgraduate administrative processes to enable tracking of student progress.

“Another challenge we face is the low participation of Black South African students, particularly coloured and African students, in our postgraduate programmes compared to white South African and international students,” said Ramugondo.

The final member of the deanery team is Professor Ambroise Wonkam who remains in his position as Deputy Dean of Research, a position he has held since 2018.

In his portfolio, the focus is on enhancing research performance in thematic priority disease areas: infection, neuroscience and mental health, chronic lifestyle diseases, cancer and other African-specific disease burdens.

“As the top research university on the continent, we need to have a very strong focus not only for South Africa but also for the African continent,” said Wonkam.

During his time in office, Wonkam has, thus far, overseen the implementation of programmatic research grants; building human capital with specific attention on the transformation of the Science Cohort, and, enhancing strategic grouping through research themes; creating an enabling platform, and fostering Afropolitanism.

There have been numerous challenges along the way, most notably the tragic loss of the dean, colleague and friend, Professor Bongani Mayosi. The start of Wonkam’s tenure was thus a traumatic one and coincided with the tail end of the Fees Must Fall and Rhodes Must Fall protest action.

Despite this, the portfolio has delivered on numerous key objectives. This includes reviewing research finance operations; finalisation of the faculty’s risks register; key appointments, including the creation of a faculty director of research; introducing programmatic awards such as the honours student transformation award through the faculty research committee and stimulus grants for clinical researchers, emerging researchers and for accredited research groupings; and partnering with [The African Academy of Science](#).

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