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## **New UCT head of nursing shines spotlight on role of nurses in GBV interventions**



Tania De Villiers

Photo: Supplied

New head of the Division of Nursing and Midwifery at the University of Cape Town's (UCT) Faculty of Health Sciences, Dr Tania De Villiers, is on a mission to strengthen the division's focus on community service and social responsiveness during her tenure.

She considers herself an activist, more importantly in the fight against gender-based violence (GBV). Her PhD thesis, which focused on engaging young male university students in a primary sexual violence prevention intervention in university settings, gave impetus to her research interest in GBV.

In her PhD she used and adapted the Sonke Gender Justice One Man Can intervention and developed the Men With Conscience (MWC) primary prevention intervention.

"I believe nurses as frontline workers are key in identifying and treating survivors of GBV," she says.

The Division of Nursing and Midwifery offers niche clinical specialist postgraduate diploma programmes which are currently in abeyance until re-accredited by the South African Nursing Council (SANC). The PGDip in Forensic Nursing is one such programme that focuses on addressing the needs in the community and will be submitted to the SANC for accreditation.

"I believe men play a key role in the prevention of GBV, hence the focus on young men." She is the lead investigator in her post-doctoral project, a pilot to test the MWC intervention. Due to COVID-19, and the fact-to-face nature of the intervention, this project is temporarily on hold.

A registered nurse, De Villiers obtained her undergraduate and postgraduate degrees from UCT. "I often refer to myself as 'a child of UCT', because it is here where I transitioned from a young, naive 17-year-old, to the adult I am today, hopefully much wiser," she says.

After graduating with a BSc (Nursing) degree and registering with the SA Nursing Council as a registered nurse, midwife, psychiatric nurse and community health nurse, she started working at the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital (RCCH) as a junior sister and completed a PGDip in Paediatric Nursing three years later. Her clinical practice at the RCCH, included seven years at the Therapeutic Learning Centre (Child and Family Unit).

Her motto in life is: "You may shoot me with your words. You may cut me with your eyes. You may kill me with your hatefulness. But still, like air I'll rise" [Maya Angelou]. "I believe, if one can dream it, one can be it," she adds.

During her PhD studies, she joined the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) and worked closely with the Office for Inclusivity and Change (OIC), both at UCT. De Villiers presented a number of papers at local and international conferences related to her PhD work and published in international peer-reviewed journals.

Her collaboration with partners external to UCT started during her PhD work, with the South African Medical Research Council (SAMR), Sonke Gender Justice Network and the UCLA (San Francisco) Global Campus Violence Prevention Network (GCVP Network), with which she is still involved. De Villiers is an international member of the Nursing Network on Violence Against Women International.

She says she was challenged by the following statement on Women's Day: "How can we celebrate when it's no longer a question of "if it happens" but "when it happens" or "when it happens AGAIN". Before you celebrate Women's Day today, before you post pictures of your mothers and sisters, ask yourself what you have actually done to make this Woman's

Day worthy of celebration, how have you helped and honoured women since last year and how will you help women until next year?"

"On behalf of the Division of Nursing and Midwifery I am asking: How can we make a difference?"

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