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19 April 2022

UCT and Queen Mary University of London team awarded R52 million funding to boost life-saving surgery research in Africa

A team of University of Cape Town (UCT) and Queen Mary University of London researchers have successfully secured almost £3 million (R52 million) in funding for a new research programme that will establish centres of research excellence in four African countries with the aim of saving the lives of patients who undergo life-saving surgery.

Funding for the project was awarded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), and will be led by Professor Bruce Biccand from UCT and Professor Rupert Pearse from Queen Mary University of London, United Kingdom.

Working closely with academics and healthcare professionals in local hospitals, the programme aims to improve patient safety and outcomes in Africa, where more than 600,000 people die after surgery each year. This is twice the global average. Patients who survive also have a lowered life expectancy, poorer quality of life and financial hardship in dealing with the ongoing complications. The number of patients in Africa who experience complications after surgery is significantly higher than the world average – with one in five on the continent dealing with complications such as sepsis and haemorrhage.

Bruce Biccand, Professor and Second Chair in the Department of Anaesthesia and Perioperative Medicine at Groote Schuur Hospital and UCT said: "We hope that through this vital grant we will save many lives across Africa while improving people's long-term health and reducing their financial strain after life-saving surgery. It's clear that patients in Africa need better pre-, intra- and post-surgical care than they currently receive. Through our research and working closely with local health systems and those on the ground, we want to introduce safer and more effective practices, bring about the necessary policy changes, train future African researchers, and build on our existing work on the continent to save up to 300,000 lives each year."

This work will include creating centres of research excellence in Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia, and South Africa, where a comprehensive research programme will be developed to help improve the safety and effectiveness of pre-, intra- and post-surgical care across Africa.

Crucially these centres of excellence will also have a major role in supporting current African researchers interested in improving surgical care, combined with research training for the next generation of clinical academics. Of the £3 million awarded, over £2 million will be spent in

Africa to build more research capacity and capabilities across the continent with the aim that more research in Africa can be led by African clinicians.

Professor Rupert Pearse said: "The funding was awarded in recognition that there is a need across Africa for a substantial increase in the number of surgeries to meet patients' health needs. To prevent a subsequent rise in deaths after surgery, our team of researchers will work to develop solutions specifically, tailored to the needs of the various health systems, to support safe surgical care."

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Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

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