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## **UCT champions compassionate care in groundbreaking project**

*Multistakeholder meeting with local and Belgian experts discusses implementation of palliative care in underserved areas in Cape Town*

The University of Cape Town (UCT) is at the forefront of transforming palliative care in South Africa through a groundbreaking, community-based initiative that draws on global best practices. Piloted in Heideveld by family physician Dr Jennie Morgan, the project is a pioneering approach informed by community-based palliative care models developed in India and other parts of the world.

Funded by VLIR-UOS, this five-year study responds to the growing need for palliative care in South Africa by developing Compassionate Communities of Care. It is anchored in a collaborative, multistakeholder and multi-institutional approach by UCT's [Chronic Diseases Initiative for Africa \(CDIA\)](#), the [Division of Interdisciplinary Palliative Care and Medicine \(IPCM\)](#) and the [Cancer Research Initiative](#) in partnership with Ghent University and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel in Belgium. The project is aligned with provincial and national palliative care policy and works closely with the Western Cape Palliative Care Task Team.

### **Addressing a critical health challenge**

In South Africa, palliative care is primarily home-based and delivered by hospices, focusing on pain relief and holistic support. However, access remains limited due to low awareness or "death literacy," which can create fear and reluctance to engage with palliative care services. Increasing demand calls for urgent education and health promotion to enhance relationships between providers, patients and families – and to better support caregivers. Palliative care is essential for people with serious health conditions such as cancer, heart and kidney failure, advanced infectious diseases and dementia. Despite this, many patients' needs remain unrecognised or underreported, leading to avoidable suffering and high costs of care. The project aims to establish clear, supportive care pathways within the health system to address these gaps.

### **Sharing minds, changing lives**

At its heart, the VLIR project is about building community capacity and empowering patients and caregivers to navigate death, dying and bereavement with dignity and support. By embedding palliative care training into undergraduate and postgraduate medical education,

UCT is helping to bridge the gap between policy and practice, ensuring that a better-trained workforce can strengthen palliative care delivery in under-resourced communities. The project supports four scholarships, including one PhD candidate at Heideveld Emergency Centre focused on reducing readmission rates among patients with advanced illness, and three MPhil students in Palliative Care.

The official project launch brought together leading voices in end-of-life care worldwide, including researchers from Ghent University and the Compassionate Communities Centre of Expertise (COCO) at Vrije Universiteit Brussel. The event featured keynote presentations on the current state of palliative care in South Africa and Belgium, along with site visits and engagement with key local and international stakeholders, such as PALPRAC, the African Palliative Care Association (APCA), and Public Health Palliative Care International (PHPCI).

### **Project ambitions**

As CDIA's Chief Research Officer, Associate Professor Peter Delobelle, stated: "It is hoped that through this project we will be able to improve interactions between patient and service providers, resulting in improved quality of life and lower unplanned admissions."

In addition, Associate Professor Rene Krause from IPCM noted: "By strengthening curricular integration of under- and postgraduate students, we will develop educational and capacity building and local agents of change to improve the palliative care landscape in the Western Cape, and South Africa in general."

The project underscores UCT's commitment to addressing crucial health challenges using innovative, impactful scholarships. By addressing palliative care using a community-based focus, UCT is committed to developing practical, culturally relevant solutions that resonate beyond South Africa's borders. Through initiatives like this, UCT is cementing its reputation as a premier university in Africa – aimed at improving health outcomes across the continent. As it continues to invest in cutting-edge, collaborative work, UCT remains firmly positioned at the forefront of efforts to combat chronic disease and its increasing burden.

***Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department***

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