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27 January 2025

UCT to launch proposed proton therapy centre to boost cancer treatment

29 January 2025 | 17:00 for 17:30 | Neuroscience Institute Auditorium, Groote Schuur Hospital

A multidisciplinary team based at the University of Cape Town (UCT) will design the technical specifications and business case for a proton therapy centre to be established in Cape Town, near to both the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital and Groote Schuur Hospital.

The centre is set to become among only three – out of 135 globally – in the southern hemisphere. The official launch of the UCT Proton Therapy Initiative will take place on Wednesday, 29 January 2025, at UCT's Neuroscience Institute.

The event will be attended by, among others, UCT Vice-Chancellor Professor Mosa Moshabela; Western Cape MEC for Health and Wellness, Ms Mireille Wenger; and President and Chief Executive Officer of the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC), Professor Ntobeko Ntusi.

Proton therapy is a form of radiation therapy for cancer that utilises a beam of energetic protons from a cyclotron (a machine that accelerates charged particles to speeds approaching the speed of light).

The unique characteristics of this proton beam allow a type of radiotherapy treatment which is highly effective for a wide range of tumours and significantly reduces the late side effects of radiation therapy. In children in particular, proton beam therapy is now recognised as superior to conventional radiotherapy techniques with less damage to normal tissue and reduced risk of secondary malignancy.

Currently, all of the 135 proton therapy centres operating globally are located in the northern hemisphere, with only two under construction in the southern hemisphere – in Argentina and Australia.

The proton therapy centre in Cape Town will be designed to benefit from the very latest technological advances, and include facilities for the production of short-lived radioisotopes

for nuclear medicine, and beam lines for research in physics, engineering, neuroscience, radiation metrology and radiobiology. The centre in Cape Town will be a unique world-leading resource not only for South Africa, but for the African continent. The financial sustainability plan will have both public and commercial components.

The multidisciplinary project features both an outstanding oncology clinical team based at UCT and associated hospitals, spanning both public and private sectors, and strong expertise in accelerator-based research and development. iThemba LABS national facility is located in Cape Town and operates a number of accelerators for radioisotope production and research, but no longer offers proton therapy, leaving a critical gap in cancer therapy in the region.

This project will be jointly led by Professor Andy Buffler, director of the Metrological and Applied Sciences Research Unit, Department of Physics; Professor Jeannette Parkes, head of Radiation Oncology, and Professor Graham Fieggen, director of the Neuroscience Institute.

Date: Wednesday, 29 January 2025

Time: 17:00 for 17:30

Venue: Neuroscience Institute Auditorium, Groote Schuur Hospital

- Members of the media wishing to attend the event are requested to [RSVP](#).

Ends

Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

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