



Neuroscience
Institute

Newsletter

2025 | Issue 4



HEMISPHERE^{ECTOMY}



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
IYUNIVESITHI YASEKAPA • UNIVERSITEIT VAN KAAPSTAD



DIRECT

from the directorate



Welcome to this year's Neuroscience Institute newsletter.

Our year ended on a sad note with the passing of Professor Dan Stein, NI Scientific Lead and one of the most outstanding figures in the field of neuroscience worldwide. Shortly after his return to UCT in 2005 as Chair of the Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health, Dan established the Brain-Behaviour Initiative as a university signature theme, which led to the establishment of the URC-accredited Brain-Behaviour Centre, as well as laying a foundation for the Neuroscience Institute.

So much has been written about Dan's extraordinary scholarly contribution, and his leadership on the continent and worldwide, but this is where he worked – we miss him and will never forget the many ways in which he enriched our world.

We hope you'll enjoy reading about some of the successes of our members in the pages that follow, many of which are testament to Dan's contributions, among which the 10th anniversary of CUBIC earlier this year was truly something to celebrate. Another highlight was the Harry Oppenheimer Fellowship Award made to Professor Anthony Figaji, Platforms Lead for the NI. Following Mark Solms (2017), Tony is the second NI member to receive this award - considered the highest academic accolade in our country. It is especially inspiring to see an active clinician attain the benchmark of research excellence that this represents.

We were excited to welcome our inaugural Master of Neuroscience students, and congratulate program convener Dr Melike Fourie and the class of 2025 for launching this truly interdisciplinary program, together with all our graduating students and their teachers and supervisors.

This has been a tough year in many respects, at our university and beyond. One of the more obvious problems has been massive cuts to US Federal funding, but, as always, South Africans have shown incredible resilience and gels in pulling together to find solutions and we appreciate the resilience and grit you've shown in the face of these challenges.



We are very grateful to the funders who continue to support us through these challenging times, and we hope to have some exciting developments to share in the new year.

We are grateful to our dedicated Scientific Advisory Board led by Professor Matthew Wood, and Governing Board, chaired by Interim DVC for Research & Internationalisation, Professor Jeff Murugan, for the past 2 years. We would like to extend a special word of appreciation to him, and to Vice Chancellor Professor Mosa Moshabela, for their support and leadership over the past year.

The existence of the NI is testament to the hard work and dedication of many people, not least our Research Enterprise Manager, Dr Jacquie Bracher, who this year celebrated 10 years in the role. For many years the only full-time NI person, Jacquie brings creativity, calmness, and impeccable judgement to our team, and makes great things happen for all of us.

Finally, thank you to Hayley for your irrepressible enthusiasm leading our communications portfolio and putting together such a fabulous newsletter – we’re very proud of the work you do. If you have a story to tell, please make sure you’re talking to Hayley. (Incidentally, this newsletter was named Hemisphere, for Hayley’s aspiration to have two issues each year, but since we continue to cruise on one, Hemispherectomy seems fitting!)

We wish you well over the festive season, may you travel safely and return refreshed and ready for the new year. 2026 will mark the 10th anniversary of the NI, which we plan to celebrate in an appropriate fashion. We’ll start with a welcome event on Friday 6th February where our beautiful atrium shall be transformed into a mini golf course - bring your swing and feel free to overdress...

*sincerely yours,
Kirsty and Graham*

Reaching out through public engagement

We are proud of the commitment to public engagement shown by our NI members. Workshops, helplines, blogs and campaigns create positive media and help broader communities understand the work we do, especially for families dealing with brain health issues.

In our commitment to ethical research and sensitive data gathering, we aim to grow more ‘closing-the-loop’ research, where communities are consulted and informed. A highlight is always Brain Awareness Day, where researchers and labs give so generously of their time in engaging with the public and schools. Look out for ways to get involved as we plan to grow this event year by year.

Media enquiries: Hayley is standing by to forward these to a member with the relevant neuro-subspecialty for prompt response.



The UCT Neuroscience Institute is deeply saddened by the passing of Professor Dan Stein on 6 December 2025, after a short illness.

Professor Stein was not only an exceptional colleague but also a generous mentor to many within the Institute. As Chair of the Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health at UCT and Director of the SAMRC Unit on Risk & Resilience in Mental Disorders, he played a central role in shaping the landscape of mental health research in South Africa and beyond.

His vision and leadership were instrumental in establishing neuroscience research at UCT. In 2005, he founded the Brain-Behaviour Initiative, a multidisciplinary hub that brought together psychiatry, neuroscience, and allied fields. This initiative laid the foundations for what later became the Neuroscience Institute, launched in 2015 as the first institute of its kind on the African continent.

Professor Stein's research spanned anxiety and related disorders, drawing on basic neuroscience, clinical trials, epidemiology, and public mental health. He championed a biopsychosocial approach that integrated neuroscience with clinical practice and philosophical reflection, this approach shaping generations of clinicians and scientists.

He was a committed mentor whose support extended far beyond formal supervision. Many of those he guided now hold senior academic and clinical leadership positions around the world. His contributions also included leading Africa's first nationally representative mental health survey, pioneering neuroimaging and neurogenetics research locally, and advancing a wide range of interdisciplinary projects.

Professor Stein's scholarly output (over 1,600 peer-reviewed articles, more than 25 edited volumes, and an h-index exceeding 220), reflects the breadth and depth of his influence. His work informed international guidelines and helped shape global mental health discourse. His recent book, *Problems of Living: Perspectives from Philosophy, Psychiatry, and Cognitive-Affective Science*, exemplifies his ability to bridge scientific and humanistic perspectives with clarity and compassion.

The Neuroscience Institute is profoundly grateful for Professor Stein's leadership, mentorship, and unwavering commitment to advancing psychiatric neuroscience in Africa. His legacy will remain deeply felt in our community.

We extend our heartfelt condolences to his wife, Professor Heather Zar; his children, Gabriella, Josh, and Sarah; and his grandson, Rafa.

To leave a message for Dan's family please go to this online noticeboard.



A year to remember for Anthony Figaji

Professor Anthony Figaji, head of Paediatric Neurosurgery at the UCT and Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital and NI Platforms lead, was awarded the [Harry Oppenheimer Fellowship](#) for his pioneering research into childhood brain injury for 2025.

The Harry Oppenheimer Fellowship is one of the most sought-after academic honours on the continent, and at an award ceremony on 15 July 2025, Prof Figaji's groundbreaking research was recognised. He and his research group, [African Brain Child](#) (ABC), based at Red Cross Children's Hospital and the Neuroscience Institute are striving to decode the physiology and improve treatment of brain injury in children.

This long-standing fellowship, which recognises established researchers, has [previously been awarded](#) to nine UCT academics. Tony becoming the tenth recipient makes UCT the institution with the most awardees.

Oppenheimer Fellowship will advance childhood brain research

16 JULY 2025 | STORY HAYLEY TOMES. Read time 8 min.



Paediatric neurosurgeon, Professor Anthony Figaji, of UCT's Neuroscience Institute, has been awarded the prestigious Harry Oppenheimer Fellowship for pioneering research into childhood brain injury.



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If that wasn't enough, Tony has been inaugurated as [President of the International Society for Paediatric Neurosurgery](#) (ISPNO). The ISPNO's mission is to improve the health and welfare of children requiring neurosurgical care throughout the world via scientific research and close international cooperation. As he noted in his address, this presidency offers a rare opportunity to shape the global agenda of paediatric neurosurgery from Africa, where there are more children needing neurosurgical care than anywhere else in the world. Ensuring the needs of African children remain at the forefront will be a central focus of his presidency.



Prof Figaji dons the historic ISPNO presidential poncho during the inauguration ceremony in Lyon, France.

These accolades make 2025 a year to remember for Tony Figaji, but also arrive on the back of exceptional professional recognition for him and his team in 2024.

In January of last year, he and his team received a [Wellcome Discovery Award](#) for their work on TB meningitis and paediatric brain infections - the first of the Discovery Awards to be awarded to an entirely African research group. That same year, the ABC group earned the [NRF Science Team Award](#) for advances in paediatric neuro-critical care and multimodal brain monitoring. He was also elected to the American Academy of Neurological Surgeons. Honours that highlight both Tony's personal achievements and the growing impact of African neuroscience globally.



Our Honours and Masters Class of '25

OUR INAUGURAL MNEUROSC CLASS



KIM KUN WOO (CHRIS)

A tragedy to lose one of our MNeuroSc students this year, may he rest in peace. We are grateful for the time we had with him, to be inspired by him. What a privilege to experience his passion for thinking about the deepest questions of the human experience. A remarkable person who will be deeply missed, and whose curiosity and gentleness will not be easily forgotten.



Our first cohort of the Master of Neuroscience (MNeuroSc) degree were a seriously impressive group of students, whilst also managing to be downright delightful! Their mini thesis submissions are due end of January 2026 and they will graduate in March next year! We wish them every success and thank them for being our brave first cohort! Many thanks are also due to programme convenor **Dr Melike Fourie** for her immense hard-work!



HONOURS 'CLASS OF 2025'



Our 2025 Honourlings looking spiffy in their NI hoodies (left) and adorable (below). The Honours programme continues to be extremely competitive and we are exceptionally proud of this tight-knit group of superstars, well-guided by **Dr Jacquie Womersley**, with some truly stand-out students.





A new chapter for African precision medicine at the NI

The Neuroscience Institute is proud to introduce the **Clinical Omics & Informatics (COIN) Unit** - an expanded evolution of the NI's longstanding Neurogenomics Lab. Built on clinical-genomics partnerships, bioinformatics capacity building, and African-focused genomic research, the Lab's growth has outpaced its original name. COIN reflects a deliberate broadening of scope: leveraging multiple omics technologies (including genomics, transcriptomics and proteomics) and the computational workflows needed to analyse African datasets at scale. "Clinical Omics" highlights patient-centred application, while "Informatics" recognises the data-science expertise at the core of the unit's work, as COIN strengthens its contribution to African precision medicine.

COIN is led by **Dr Melissa Nel** (a clinician turned genome scientist), with genetic counsellor Nabeelah Peerbhai supporting clinical translation and patient-facing work. The team includes postgraduate researchers Zama Mngadi, Gideon Wiafe, Saifeldeen Elshahawy and Waheed Amanjee, whose projects span bioinformatics, workflow development, clinical data integration and ancestry-aware analyses, alongside research communications officer Erin Kinghorn. By embedding a dedicated communications role, COIN affirms that impactful African genomic medicine must be underpinned by ethical, accessible public engagement.

Guided by values of equity, collaboration, translation, inclusion, integrity, capacity building and representation, COIN is committed to African genomics led by African expertise, informed by African data, and focused on long-term community benefit.

We also unveil COIN's new logo: a circular, interconnected pangenome motif representing genomic diversity across African populations, paired with a subtle "command-line" aesthetic that nods to the computational backbone of the unit's work. Together, it reflects COIN's identity - grounded in diversity, powered by computation, and driven by equitable precision medicine.

Looking ahead, COIN will deepen collaborations across the NI and UCT, build neurogenomics capacity, and develop tools, datasets and communication approaches that make genomic medicine more inclusive and representative.

Introducing the
Clinical Omics and Informatics (COIN) Unit

Dr Melissa Nel	Ms Nabeelah Peerbhai	Ms Erin Kinghorn
Ms Noma Monnagotla	Ms Amokelani Mahungu	Mr Waheed Amanjee
Mr Gideon Wiafe	Mr Saifeldeen Elshahawy	Ms Zama Mngadi



Research WHERE it is most needed!

Andrew T. Hale, MD, PhD, is an Honorary Research Associate in the Department of Human Biology and a member of the Neuroscience Institute at UCT, a resident physician in the Department of Neurosurgery at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, and a post-doctoral scientist at Massachusetts General Hospital & Harvard in the laboratory of Kristopher Kahle. He earned his MD and PhD from Vanderbilt University School of Medicine.

At UCT, Andy is working with Dr Mubeen Goolam, from the Human Biology Department, and Dr Janine Scholefield, from the CSIR, to create brain organoid models that recapitulate the molecular hallmarks of hydrocephalus and preceding brain injuries/infections. His research focuses on elucidating the genetic and molecular basis of neurosurgical disorders, specifically hydrocephalus, using integrated human genetics, functional genomics, brain organoids, molecular, and biochemical approaches.

South Africa & Sub-Saharan Africa are disproportionately impacted by hydrocephalus, accounting for approximately 50% of the cases globally. Additionally, Africa has the most genetic diversity of any continent in the world, but despite this, African genetics are extremely under-represented in global databases.

Watch the below video to learn more (Videographer: Boipelo Khunou)



A tale of two neurosurgeons, Prof Graham Fieggen with new NI member, Dr Andy Hale. Photo Boipelo Khunou, [Botaki Studio](#).



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Inaugural Multi-Institute Symposium

The first Multi-Institute Symposium (MIS) sparked connections and collaborations, and created excitement about possibility. Held under the theme of **Inflammation**, the inaugural MIS was more than a showcase of biomedical research - it was a space designed to inspire researchers across the Institute of Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine (IDM), the Neuroscience Institute, the Cape Heart Institute, and the UCT Lung Institute to think about intersections and to stimulate ideas around working together in new ways.

The idea for the symposium originated when the Directors of the institutes mutually agreed on one person who had inspired all of them in their careers - Professor Wieland Gevers. A towering figure in South African science with a long and distinguished UCT career, Prof Gevers founded the IDM and, in doing so, planted the seeds for the other institutes to grow. Thus the symposium's purpose is twofold, to celebrate Prof. Gevers's legacy and to forge new connections between the four major institutes based on UCT's Faculty of Health Sciences campus.

During the MIS, each of the institutes showcased two of their core facilities, exposing attendees to the available resources and highlighting the significant potential for cross-institutional use. Spanning cutting-edge microscopy, cytometry, disease models, and molecular platforms, the displays weren't just technical exhibits - they were catalysts for connection.

Also included were TED-style talks, informal panels, and a visual storytelling session. The "Rising Stars" café, had early-career researchers share their work on a whiteboard in relaxed, small-group settings.



The highlight of the event was, no doubt, the announcement by IDM Director, Professor Digby Warner, of the Wieland Gevers Research Stimulus Award - a new funding initiative born out of the MIS that aims to support inter-institute collaboration and bold, cross-disciplinary research.

Inspired by a visionary. Driven by collaboration.
Addressing critical health needs.

*Wording edited from this [article](#)
written by Yulisha Naidoo*



UCT AI Initiative: Launch of African Hub

On 28 September, the University of Cape Town and the Global Centre on AI Governance launched the [African Hub on AI Safety, Peace, and Security](#) - the first platform of its kind designed to ensure African perspectives are at the centre of global AI safety debates. Funded by the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO), the launch brought together students, academics, international partners, and dignitaries, with opening remarks from UCT Vice-Chancellor Professor Mosa Moshabela, Emily Middleton (UK Department of Science, Innovation and Technology), and Maggie Gómez Vélez (IDRC).

Associate Professor Jonathan Shock, interim director of the UCT AI Initiative, said: "This hub is about more than science - it's about societal impact. Our aim is to ensure Africa's priorities are represented in global AI debates while advancing research, building capacity, and influencing policy," as articulated in this recent [publication](#). He emphasised that the hub will address neglected issues in African contexts, including election disinformation, AI-driven surveillance, and labour market impacts. Over the next three years, the hub will focus on research, capacity strengthening, and policy influence through partnerships with networks such as Masakhane, Qhala and Code for Africa.

Keynote speaker Dr Chinasa Okolo, founder of Technecultura, called for multilingual evaluation systems, regional infrastructure investment, and public participation in AI governance, stressing that "without African leadership, so-called global safety initiatives will remain incomplete."



Director of the UCT AI Initiative, Associate Professor Jonathan Shock, addressing the audience (left) and all the event speakers & panelists (right).



The panel discussion chaired by Dr Rachel Adams. Holding the microphone is keynote speaker, Dr Chinasa Okolo (left) and the packed venue for this Sunday evening event! The interest in this topic was clear to see.



The Clinical Ethics Forum

The EthicsLab actively engages in initiatives aimed at building moral resilience among those who work in healthcare. The Clinical Ethics Forum, run by visionary **Dr Heidi Matissonn** and held monthly in the Neuroscience Institute, is one such initiative. Participants from a diverse range of clinical and non-clinical disciplines put their heads (and sometimes their hearts) together to tackle the ethical complexities that characterise the healthcare setting. The CEF has been a meaningful additional to the clinical enterprise at Groote Schuur Hospital.

This year's CEFs addressed an array of morally distressing issues: the distress of discharging decisions; the difficulties of enhancing the quality of a shortened life in resource-constrained settings, and concerns around who makes a 'good' candidate for surgery when the surgical waiting list is under severe pressure. They considered their own biases in one session entitled 'Addicts, outcasts, and the ethics of treatment' and tried to balance hope and harm in deciding whether to provide women with renal failure with assisted reproduction. Questions of consent were raised in sessions dedicated to organ donation and pre-natal testing for adult-onset disorders.

Although the cases they explore can be challenging, the CEF demonstrates the power of creating safe, productive spaces to turn ethical complexity into opportunities for collaboration and compassion.

While they do not record these sessions, some of them inspire the writing of short pieces, which might be a useful [resource](#).



Our first 'artist-in-residence'

Art, Imagination, and Science: Reflections on Ralph Borland's EthicsLab Residency

Dr Ralph Borland's final residency lecture at the NI marked the conclusion of a two-month artist residency with the EthicsLab.

The lecture offered a reflective pause to consider what it means to place artistic practice in sustained conversation with science, ethics, and emerging technologies.

During the residency, Ralph worked closely with researchers, clinicians, and students across the Institute. Rather than translating science into art or using art as illustration, his practice treated artistic inquiry as a way of noticing, questioning, and intervening in clinical environments where ethical issues are embedded in everyday life.

The residency coincided with the EthicsLab's AI and Imagination retreat (13–15 October), a three-day gathering examining ethical questions raised by generative AI in creative practice. Discussions explored how AI is reshaping cultural production and challenging ideas of originality and authorship, while also positioning creatives as ethicists in their own right.

A key outcome of the residency is Ralph's proposal for a large-scale light-based installation in the Institute's atrium. In his final lecture, he discussed working with dichroic lenses—materials whose colour shifts with light, movement, and time of day—and presented a small prototype that demonstrated how light responds to bodies moving through space.

Beyond a single artwork, the residency points toward a broader model of collaboration between artists, scientists, and ethicists. Ralph reflected on the value of being embedded in the Institute's everyday life through shared spaces, conversations, and open-ended processes without predetermined outcomes.



Sunday Times NOVEMBER 23.

A playful collision

SCULPTURE LIFESTYLE | 15

RALPH BORLAND

of imagination, engineering and activism

Born a 3D scan of his own femur into a playable bone flute. Heart, bone, brain – a conceptual installation by South African artist Ralph Borland. The Southern African artist, known for his playful mix of art, imagination, engineering and activism, has been shuttling between his studio and an office at the Neuroscience Institute's Neuroscience Institute, where he's the inaugural artist-in-residence with EthicsLab. In a black-and-white painting on paper, a sculptor in his studio is working on a sculpture of a human heart, while a neurologist and a neurologist with his sketchbook, Dr Borland, who grew up in South Africa and Zimbabwe, has been pushing the boundaries of what's possible as materials rather than limitations.

This is the same artist who created *Soldier* for the 2023 Commonwealth Games, a sculpture that breaths the wearer's heart rate – an early 2000s provocateur now housed in MoMA. He followed that with *Hot Metal* (2024), a modular, 3D-printed human heart, a sculptural system that arrived first in a dream, then in sketches, and in now sprawling installations in South Africa and around the world. *Hot Metal* (2024), is a modular wire sculpture developed with a team of 10 street wire artists over nearly 100 days – a conversation between Great Britain's sister governments, Mozambique's sugar barons and the everyday

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Artist Ralph Borland with his bone flute, above, and *Hot Metal*, MAYA!, a piece developed with a team of 10 street wire artists. © 2024 Ralph Borland

This approach informs his vision for a future artist-in-residence programme at the Neuroscience Institute. Rather than positioning artists as communicators of scientific work, the proposed model treats artistic practice as a form of inquiry capable of surfacing ethical, social, and experiential questions often overlooked by conventional research, opening new forms of dialogue within the institution.



Ad Hominem promotions & other awards



Prof Andy Buffler, our resident physicist & chair of the [Proton Therapy Initiative](#)



Awards

Department of Medicine Research Day

Nabeelah Peerbhai - First Place Graphical Abstract in Clinical Research

Dr Sergio Alves - First place Graphical Abstract in Basic Science Research

Dr Tarin Europa - Second Place Dragons Den Award for the Best Research Proposal

Department of Surgery Research Day

Dr Devon van Eck - Best postgraduate clinical presentation.

Welcoming new members/staff who joined in 2025

Dr Aayesha Soni (re-joined after a stint in Canada) - Neurology
Dr Adam Carpenter - Anaesthesia

Dr Alessandro Aldera - Anatomical Pathology

Dr Andrew Hale - Neurosurgeon

Dr Byron De John - Neurosurgery

Dr Caroline Jane Ross - Molecular Biology and Bioinformatics

Prof Darlene Lubbe - Otorhinolaryngology, Surgery

Dr Ettienne Coetzee - Anaesthesia & Perioperative Medicine

A/Prof Geoff Nitschke - Evolutionary Machine Learning

A/Prof Gladness Nethathe - Anaesthesia & Perioperative Medicine

Dr James Burger - Neuropsychiatry

Dr Lwandile Tokwe - Neuropsychiatry, HIV MHRU

Nabeelah Peerbhai - genetic counsellor & variant scientist, COIN research unit

Dr Ralph Borland - 2 month art residency with the EthicsLab

Dr Richard Burman - Neurosurgery

Prof Romy Parker - Anaesthesia & Perioperative Medicine

Prof Ryan Nefdt - Philosophy

Dr Teagan Van Wyk - CIDRI, Medicine

please accept our apologies for anyone we have missed.



Further awards and milestones



Associate Professor Tory Madden was a finalist in the 'Distinguished Young Woman Researcher' category at the South African Women in Science Awards 2025. Watch the video about the research she was nominated for [here](#).



Prof Dan Stein & Dr Mubeen Goolam received an A-rating and P-rating from the NRF, respectively, in 2025.

NRF Rating



This marked Prof Stein maintaining an A-rating for 2 decades, acknowledging him as a leading international scholar in his field.

A P-rating denotes exceptional potential & likelihood to become a future international leader of the field.



Dr. Andrew Hale is the 2024-2025 recipient of the NREF & Academy of Neurological Surgeons Research Fellowship Grant! His NREF-supported research led to [this](#) lead-author publication in Science Translational Medicine!



Dr Nico Enslin was appointed the 2025- 2029 Chair of the Surgical Therapeutic committee of the International League Against Epilepsy. As well as the newly appointed vice chair for the Education Committee of the International Society of Paediatric Neurosurgery!

A milestone for the **Cape Universities Body Imaging Center**, special congratulations to **Daniel Doetz & Prof Ernesta Meintjes**.



10
CELEBRATING
YEARS
CUBIC
at
UCT





Even more reasons to celebrate



The National Science and Technology Forum Awards, considered the largest and most comprehensive honours of their kind in SA, featured **Dr Mubeen Goolam** (bottom, left) as a finalist and A/Prof **Rachael Dangarembizi** (top, left) as a winner in the 'Emerging Researcher' category.

Furthermore, four of our health science students featured in the 2025 Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans.

Zahra Parker (top, middle), **Waheed Amanjee** (top, right), **Ashraf Moosa** (bottom, middle) and **Yanelisa Pulani** (bottom, right), who additionally completed her Hons and MSc in neuroscience as part of the intercalated programme.

DID YOU KNOW ?

The NI has our very own **Psychiatric Service Dog**, We consider her part of the core team. She has successfully passed 180 hours of training to support sad, stressed and anxious humans. She is passionate about demonstrating the psychosocial and mental health benefits of psychiatric service dogs. Her current **H(owl)-index** is **15!**

Introducing:

Nymeria



Dr Jacqueline Bracher, our phenomenal Research Enterprise Manager, celebrated 10 extremely dedicated years to the NI in 2025. So much of everything that is wonderful about the NI is due to this exceptionally special person! Thank you, Jacquie, for making the NI what it is!

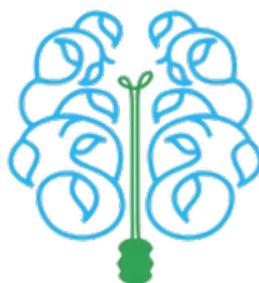
IBRO World Congress is coming to Cape Town!!

This esteemed privilege will come to pass in 2027. If you would like to get involved with the local organisers contact hayley.tomes@uct.ac.za.



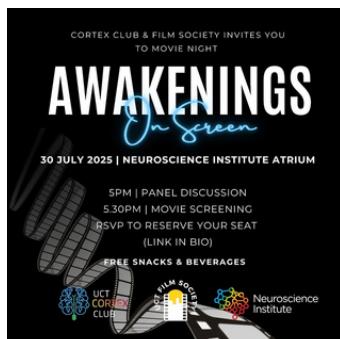


What the Cortex Club have been up to in 2025



UCT CORTEX CLUB

The **Cortex Club** committee have done a phenomenal job of hosting a steady stream of fascinating talks and workshops throughout 2025 (see some examples below). We bid farewell, with our sincerest thanks, to the committee of 2025 and welcome in the new committee for 2026.



NeuroConnect brought speed-dating energy to the Neuroscience Institute - minus the dating. Hosted by the Cortex Club, the event saw undergraduate and postgraduate students rotate through fast-paced five-minute stations packed with neuroscience-themed games, playful prompt cards, and plenty of laughter. From brainy Pictionary to a competitive "Build Your Lab" finale (with prizes on the line), NeuroConnect turned networking into genuine fun. The result was an inclusive, high-energy evening that helped students break the ice, make new friends, and feel more connected within the neuroscience and broader 'STEM' community.



The UCT Cortex Club teamed up with the [South African College of Music's Saturday Morning Music Programme](#) (youth development in school-aged learners from diverse backgrounds). They created an outreach session that blended music, movement, and brain science!! Learners jumped into a playful dance activity exploring muscle memory, followed by a calming body scan meditation aimed at building self-regulation skills. The day concluded with contributions from UCT students who play instruments recreationally, whilst studying 'non-arts disciplines', highlighting the broader cognitive and personal benefits of music education.





Special lectures

We celebrated two NI member's inaugurations this year, which is always a momentous celebration.

Our congratulations to **Professor Darlene Lubbe** and **Professor Komala Pillay!!**

UCT INAUGURAL LECTURE SERIES

Topic: Otolaryngology Through a South African Lens - Journeys, Innovations and Global Perspectives

Date: Thursday, 28 August 2025
Venue: Lecture Theatre 2
E-floor
Groote Schuur Hospital
Time: 18:00 SAST

FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES

[read more](#)

UCT INAUGURAL LECTURE SERIES

Topic: Give the PATH Less Travelled a Chance — It May Turn Out to be Magical

Date: Thursday, 30 October 2025
Venue: New Learning Centre Lecture Theatre
Anatomy Building,
Faculty of Health Sciences campus
Time: 18:00 SAST

FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES

[read more](#)

One particular lecture this year really stood out, that of **Professor Hedley Twidle** - speaking on a topic close to his heart.

'A deeply moving and insightful talk where Hedley Twidle, Associate Professor and current head of English Literary Studies at UCT, shared his collaboration with the Neuroscience Institute exploring the arts and literatures of dementia and memory loss by tackling intriguing ideas such as dementia beyond the Euro-America narrative, the politics of dementia and the selfhood of the person living with dementia at the limits of language.'

- Attendee

Go to Hedley's [website](#) and visit his archive to learn more.

Writing Forgetting: Literatures of dementia, Alzheimer's Disease, and lost memories.



DATE: 29 SEPT

TIME: 1-2:30PM (followed by drinks and light snacks)

VENUE: NI AUDITORIUM

RSVP: tinyurl.com/writingforgetting or scan the QR code



Hedley Twidle is a writer, teacher and researcher based at the University of Cape Town, where he is Associate Professor and currently head of English Literary Studies. He is the author of two essay collections, *Firepool* (2017) and *Show Me the Place* (2024), as well as a study of life writing and the South African transition, *Experiments with Truth* (2019). His anthology *The Interpreters: South Africa's New Nonfiction* (co-edited with Sean Christie) was published in May 2025. Currently, he is collaborating with members of UCT's Neuroscience Institute on a project exploring the arts and literatures of dementia and memory loss.





Neuroscience Institute



Some of the many lectures hosted in 2025

UCT CORTEX CLUB
Neuroscience Institute

BRAINS & BYTES

THE FUTURE OF NEUROSURGERY: EXPLORING THE CUTTING EDGE OF HUMAN INTELLIGENCE & DIGITAL INNOVATION THROUGH BRAIN COMPUTER INTERFACES

BRAIN-COMPUTER INTERFACE: TALK & PANEL DISCUSSION

SPEAKER
Prof Tim Denison,
Royal Academy of Engineering Chair at Oxford University, co-founder of Brain Therapeutics. Pioneers brain engineering and neurotechnology, with over 100 US patents.

PANELIST
Prof Nico Erasmus
Neurosurgeon

PANELIST
Dr. Jesus Bulbulia
Neurosurgeon

PANELIST
Prof Graham Fagen
Neurosurgeon

02 October 2025, Thursday
18:00 for 18:30 - 20:00
Snacks will be served



AFRICAN PAIN RESEARCH INITIATIVE
WORLD CLASS PAIN RESEARCH

Story as Intervention

International speakers

A/Prof Lauren Heathcote
Health psychology Researcher, Kings College London

Dr Felicity Braithwaite
Physiotherapy-trained researcher, University of Adelaid

Prof Ben Colaguri
Head of the School of Physiotherapy, University of Sydney

Dr Hemakumar Devan
Clinical academic in pain management, University of Otago, Whakatane, Waikato

Moderator: A/Prof Tory Madden
Clinician researcher and director of the African Pain Research Initiative, Dept Anaesthesia & Perioperative Medicine, UCT

Local panellists

Aliza Kueijk
Co-facilitator of the Groote Schuur Hospital Chronic Pain Clinic support group, with lived experience of chronic pain

Prof Jackie Hoare
Neuropsychiatrist and researcher, UCT & Groote Schuur Hospital

Nwabisa Mlandu
Neuropsychologist, UCT

Yekuwa Chideya
Clinical social worker and researcher, Stellenbosch University

9th Sept | 3:40pm | Neuroscience Institute Auditorium | RSVP

In 2025, the NI had the privilege of hosting many rich discussions by incredible African and international speakers, for lectures and panel discussions, organised by our research groups or student organisations.

EthicsLab
Webinar

Repair, Reuse, Salvage: Bringing African Practices of Repair and Salvage into Dialogue with AI Ethics

What can the everyday ethics of repair, reuse, and
salvage teach us about the moral life of AI?

Across African cities, technicians and recyclers
sustain technological life amid scarcity, toxicity,
and neglect. Dr. Samuel Mapanta reflects AI
ethics through these grounded practices of
care, repair, and endurance, while suggesting
new ways to imagine ethical and sustainable
digital futures.

26 November 2025
13:00 - 14:00 SAST
Scan to RSVP

EthicsLab
Webinar

From Theory to Practice, Practice to Theory: African Feminist Reimaginings of AI and Data Governance

Can African women's experiences reshape the global story of AI and data? Join us for a conversation on why centring women's lived experiences matters for the future of technology in Africa and beyond.

13 November 2025
15:00 - 16:00 SAST
Scan to RSVP

EthicsLab
Webinar

TRAILBLAZING AT THE INTERFACE OF BRAINS, ETHICS, AI, AND TECHNOLOGY

SPEAKER: Prof Judy Illes
DATE: Friday, 14 November 2025
TIME: 10:00-11:00
VENUE: UCT Neuroscience Auditorium

One ethics CPD point accredited.

Student Psychiatry Society
Neuroscience Institute

Insights into Behavioural Medicine

A/Prof Stephan Roche
Chair Research Officer
HIV Mental Health Research Unit

Dr Lwandle Tokwe
Senior Research Officer
HIV Mental Health Research Unit

7 August
16h00-17h00
Neuroscience Institute Auditorium

MAX AND ROSE LEISEROWITZ BIOETHICS LECTURE

HOW PLACEBOS CHALLENGE THE FOUNDATIONS AND ETHICS OF MEDICINE

Professor Dien Ho
Director of the Center for Health Humanities
Professor of Philosophy and Healthcare Ethics
Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, Boston, USA

Although placebos have served as invaluable controls in randomized clinical trials, the use of therapeutic placebos remains contentious. In this talk, we will discuss the lessons returning from recent placebo research and how they span core philosophical assumptions in medicine. How should medicine respond, for instance, if the benefits of a treatment turn out to be entirely placebo?

The lessons from placebo research teach us a great deal about our physiology, what counts as evidence for therapeutic effectiveness, and the goals of care.

DATE: WEDNESDAY 23 APRIL 2025
TIME: 13H00 - 14H00
VENUE: NEUROSCIENCE INSTITUTE AUDITORIUM IN PERSON ONLY

ETHICS CPD ACCREDITED

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
Bioethics Research Institute, Neuroscience Institute

Neuroscience Institute

ALEX HOISCHEN
LEAD OF THE GENOMIC TECHNOLOGIES FOR IMMUNE-MEDIATED AND INFECTIOUS DISEASES RESEARCH GROUP AT RADBOUD UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER, NETHERLANDS. SPECIALIZING IN THE DISCOVERY OF RARE DISEASE GENES THROUGH CUTTING-EDGE GENOMICS APPROACHES

SOLVING RARE DISEASES BY SYSTEMATIC DATA RE-ANALYSIS AND APPLICATION OF LONG-READ GENOME SEQUENCING

31 OCTOBER 2025
10:00 - 11:00
NEUROSCIENCE INSTITUTE AUDITORIUM, GROOTE SCHUUR HOSPITAL

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

- Cutting-edge sequencing in rare disease research
- Translational long-read sequencing in the clinic
- Live Q&A session

REGISTER HERE TO BE REMINDED

Scan to RSVP

EthicsLab
Neuroscience Institute

What they don't teach in Med School

A panel discussion

Date: Tuesday, 19 August 2025
Time: 15:30 - 17:00
Venue: Neuroscience Institute, Auditorium, E-floor

Scan to register

Space is limited - please RSVP to reserve a place

Register Here

MOHAMMED A. MOSTAJI-RADJU, PhD
ASSOCIATE RESEARCH SCIENTIST
DIRECTOR - LIVE CELL BIOTECHNOLOGY DISCOVERY LAB
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SANTA CRUZ Genomics Institute

PROGRAMMING & REPROGRAMMING NEURONAL CIRCUITS

Using brain organoids across the evolutionary tree to study cortical fate specification and circuit wiring, by combining high-density electrophysiology with deep learning models.

1 Dec 2025 | 14h00 | Neuroscience Institute Auditorium

UNICEF VOLUNTEER

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE: EXPLORING HIV THROUGH A CONTEMPORARY LENS

Assoc. Prof. Nisha Jacob
Public Health Physician at UCT's School of Public Health.

Dr. Ashraf Grimwood
Medical Doctor with a Master's in Public Health and the Founder of Kethwipha.

Jason Naidoo
Community Liaison Officer for the Emthoneni and Phillipi Village Research Site.

Cynthia Nemboto Mpango
Community Liaison Officer for the Emthoneni and Phillipi Village Research Site.

Fatima Hasson
Human Rights Lawyer and Social Justice Activist, as well as the founder of the Health Justice Initiative.

Prof. Jackie Hoare
Neuropsychiatrist and Head of the Division of Consultation Liaison Psychiatry at UCT Neuroscience Institute

When: Monday 15th September, 5 - 7pm
Where: Neuroscience Institute Auditorium, E floor
Catering provided

RSVP: tinyurl.com/HIV-panelISep

PROFESSOR SLOAN MAHONE, OXFORD UNIVERSITY

THURS 10th JULY
TALK 5-6PM
DRINKS AND SNACKS 4-5PM
NEUROSCIENCE INSTITUTE AUDITORIUM
(IN-PERSON ONLY)

Prof. Mahone is an historian of medicine and psychiatry, specializing in the intersection of these fields with colonialism and photography. Having started out in the USA Peace Corps in Zaire, she has worked in many parts of Africa on several research projects in clinical neurology. Her current work straddles the Humanities and Global Health, specifically how oral histories (ethnography) might be embedded in medicine and 'Mind-Brain Health.' She is co-founder and Oral History Director of the newly launched 'Centre for Global Epilepsies' at Wolfson College and Oxford University.

TIME CHANGE!!!

Neuroscience Institute

Centre for Global Epilepsies

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



Special Events



Project Kwakhanya Art Exhibit

An exploration of youth mental health and the role of artistic expression for Mandela Day, remembering Madiba who cherished & championed the wellbeing of children. The works exhibited were part of Project Kwakhanya, a community-based initiative which partnered community artists, Nompumelelo Rakabe & Phumeza Madikane, with local families participating in child trauma & mental health research. This resulted in a series of co-produced artworks that reflects the lived experience of South African families.

Finding Focus and Community:
the benefits of creating an effective space for research conviviality and writing for your team!

[Read MORE](#)



Transformation in Action

After months of research and collaboration, a shared vision culminated in a powerful intersection between Dr Melike Fourie, from the Social Neuroscience Lab, Alleyne&, and the UCT Faculty of Health Sciences. In July, a Transformation Workshop was hosted that brought the work to life, through the event, but also a campaign leading up to it.

Suzanne Alleyne our main speaker, challenged us to rethink power - how it resides not just in structures, but in our brains, bodies, and behaviours. Her insights opened up powerful discussions around how we experience and use power in organisational life. Dr Melike Fourie expanded on these ideas by explaining some of the neuroscience of power and its connection to empathy.



Please submit events of interest to hayley.tomes@uct.ac.za for the website [events page](#)



Hosting faculty-wide events

FACULTY CULTURE indaba 2025

3 SEPT 09:00 - 13:00
NEUROSCIENCE INSTITUTE AUDITORIUM

Lunch will be provided

The Faculty Culture Indaba facilitates discussion between key parties to find solutions to transformation challenges.

2025 FOCUS

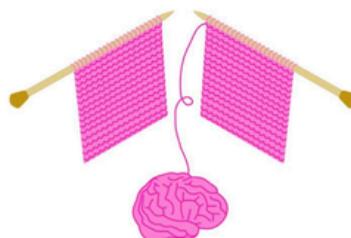
RSVP: tinyurl.com/FHSCultureIndaba

Gender Based Violence: Launching the FHS Reporting Pathways Protocol!

UCT CORTEX CLUB

Student Psychiatry Society

Craft* For Your Cortex



Relax, reset, and unwind your mind at our weekly meet ups!

Tuesdays 1-1:45pm
Wolfson Lawns and plaza (stay tuned for winter venues)

Follow @uctcortexclub & @uctpsychsoc for updates

UCT CORTEX CLUB

Student Psychiatry Society

African ClinVar Submission Drive

Collective action to improve African data representation in ClinVar



Workshop Overview:
A workshop offered by the UCT Neurogenomics lab & the ClinVar team to train, support & empower African labs to submit curated germline variants (SNVs & short indels) to ClinVar.



Key Objectives:
• Register your organization to submit variants to ClinVar
• Technical guidance & peer support
• Visibility for your lab's data in ClinVar

A dedicated Slack workspace will be available for participants to access online support during the workshop

Course Dates:
7, 14, 21, 28 July
3-4pm SAST (online)

Apply Now
Deadline to apply: 6th June 2025
tinyurl.com/2e5b69cn

Supporting little heroes at Red Cross Children's Hospital

In the 2023 Sanlam Cape Town Marathon, participating in the 5km race, we raised funds for the UCT Scrub Run. We're raising funds for the 2024 race to help provide medical care for children in South Africa and help ensure a healthier future for those most potential.

OUR TARGET THIS YEAR IS TO RAISE R10 000

IN 2024 WE RAISED OVER R25000

each and every donation, big or small every contribution truly counts

DONATION AT [GIVINGSINABELLSING2023](https://givingsinablessing2023)

DONATE to help the UCT Scrub Run raise R10 000 to help the Red Cross Children's Hospital Trust provide medical care to children in need.

Date: 18/19th Oct (at the Sanlam Cape Town Marathon)

Donate:
tinyurl.com/ScrubRun2025

THE AFRICAN RESEARCH SOCIETY UCT CHAPTER PRESENTS

SCIENCE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

DAY 1 SCIENCE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE CONGRESS 4 OCT 2025 | Neuroscience Institute
DAY 2 CANCER RESEARCH INDABA 5 OCT 2025 | Neuroscience Institute
DAY 3 RUN FOR HER 25 OCT 2025

RSVP to save your spot: tinyurl.com/5ESD0y1 tinyurl.com/5ESD0y2 tinyurl.com/5ESD0y3

The African Research Society UCT is shining a light on the powerful intersection of science and social justice. Through thought-provoking panels, critical discussions on cancer in Africa, and a fundraising race for breast cancer care, we are tackling urgent issues that affect communities in South Africa and beyond. Change begins with awareness—join us in shaping a better future through research, dialogue, and action.

ARS **IDM** **FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES** **CANCER ALLIANCE** **PROJECT FLAMINGO** **Henties** **CANAL WALK** **AMBOS**

RARE DISEASES WORKSHOP

Inqaba Biotech™, Africa's Genomics Company – serving Life Sciences in Africa

REGISTER NOW, SPACE IS LIMITED!

Inqaba Biotech, in collaboration with CERI and Radboud University Medical Center, are pleased to announce their upcoming workshop entitled 'Analysis and interpretation of NGS data for rare genetic disorders', presented by Prof. Christian Gilissen and Prof. Alex Horsch.

This three-day workshop will focus on exome and genome data analysis as well as variant interpretation within medical genetics. The utility of long-read sequence data, as well as bioinformatics considerations in rare disease genetics will also be discussed.

27 October 2025 - 29 October 2025
CERI Data Centre, JC Smuts Building, Stellenbosch University
info@inqababiotech.co.za

Neuroscience Institute

Mandela Day Drive

18 July 2025

Help us support the **UCT Food Sovereignty programme** and the **Friends Of Valkenburg Trust**

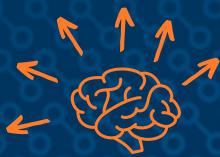
FOOD SOVEREIGNTY PROGRAMME

Department of Student Affairs (who support students facing food insecurity)

FRIENDS OF VALKENBERG TRUST

by donating nonperishable food items

it always seems impossible until it is done!



A taste of public engagement in 2025

Hayley, the NI's Communication's Manager, had great fun supporting the Cape Town Science Center's first 'Girls in STEM' camp with a career talk. She was supported by student **Michaela O'Hare**, of the Cortex Club, to run a poplar info booth complete with selfie station for the high school learners.



CTSC
Cape Town Science Centre

Western Cape Government
FOR YOU



FHS engages with learners at Eskom Science Fair for Young Scientists

The FHS recently hosted several interactive exhibits at the **Eskom Science Fair for Young Scientists 2025 (Western Cape region)** in the UCT Sports Centre, where we had the opportunity to expose budding scientists from schools across the province to career possibilities in the health sciences. Students and staff from the FHS Neuroscience Institute, Biomedical Engineering, and the Anatomy and Pathology departments answered insightful questions from learners on their research activities and their own career paths in science.

Another year, another chance to inspire school learners towards a NEURO career! Except, this year we brought other FHS departments to join in the fun at the Eskom Expo for Young Scientists, held at the UCT Sports Centre. Learners were enamoured with the specimens and models on display from Pathology & UCT MedTech.



NI member, **A/Prof Rachael Dangarembizi** being featured on the ALBA-IBRO podcast



Faculty of Health Sciences
University of Cape Town



The ISSUP Exchange

Welcome to The ISSUP Exchange, a podcast exchanging global ideas, innovations, and insights in drug demand and supply reduction.

ISSUP is an international network founded to provide the workforce with knowledge, opportunities for professional development, and training.

Our podcast is independent and offers fresh insights from thought leaders in the field.



Meet Your Host:
Dr. Goodman Sibeko



Brain Awareness Week - How to get involved!



Dr Amalia Awala (from the Dangarembizi Lab) showed incredible initiative in order to benefit her home community in Namibia. She applied for, and was awarded, a 2025 International Brain Research Organisation Neuroscience Training Grant.

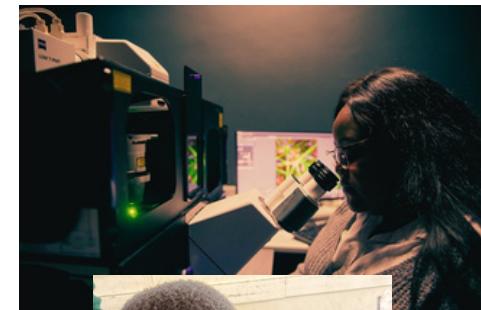
“

This week, we're at Omuulukila Primary School in northern Namibia, teaching students all about the brain and why it's so important to take care of it.

It's a truly full-circle moment for me as this is the very school where my mother dedicated over 25 years of her life as a teacher.

Grateful to IBRO and the Dana Foundation for their continued support towards African brain health 

“



Brain Awareness Week arrived with the usual excitement in 2025, and this time saw two groups of high school learners (grade 9's and grade 11's) engaged in interesting talks, demo's and activities leaving them intrigued and a little in awe of the brain! Team African Brain Child also included the CTSC in the programme this year.



BRAIN AWARENESS WEEK Dana Foundation

DANA Foundation resources [HERE](#)



This fun brain hat pattern can be found [HERE](#)

2025

HOW CAN YOUR LAB PARTICIPATE?

- Put up informative posters
- organise an event
- do a radio interview
- give a talk at a school
- write an article for popular media





ABC's 'Be Quick to Click' campaign continues

The **African Brain Child** (ABC) research group in Paediatric Neurosurgery has highlighted a critical road safety concern. Their study at Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital found that 96% of children admitted to the ICU with severe traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) sustained as passengers in motor vehicle crashes were not properly restrained by a seatbelt or car seat. These injuries and fatalities are easily preventable - Seatbelts reduce the risk of death in children by 60%, while car seats lower the risk by 71% for infants and 54% for toddlers.



To address this, ABC launched the "Be Quick to Click" campaign in 2023 to raise awareness about the lifesaving importance of seatbelts and car seats. In 2024, they partnered with Supa Quick and Wheel Well for a car seat drive, collecting over 200 donated car seats for families in need. Parents received hands-on training in correct car seat installation and use, while children enjoyed face painting and boerie rolls.



ABC continues to champion road safety through innovative projects. Their latest initiative, the "Seatbelt Convincer", will be launched at the Neuroscience Institute in March 2026. Developed in collaboration with the Cape Town Science Centre, this interactive simulator offers an experiential learning tool designed to empower children to advocate for their own safety and could be amplified into a national teaching resource.



The 'Better Together' Youth programme



A weekly open, facilitated, structured group available to all Groote Schuur Hospital in-patient or out-patient adolescents (13-24 yrs) who have a chronic illness since August 2017. This 'same time, same place' meet-up has become a safe space for adolescents to access when they need extra support, feel alone, or need to socialise with peers.



In keeping with the peer support theme the Better Together clinicians identified **mentors**, who underwent training by a psychologist and social worker, to co-facilitate the peer support group. The mentors also benefit from ongoing weekly psychological support. The programme is popular and sustainable: between Aug 2017 & Nov 2023, there were 2390 group visits involving 553 individuals.

Better Together
Support Adolescent Health at Groote Schuur Hospital

Adolescents living with chronic illness are often the most overlooked in our public healthcare system. At Groote Schuur Hospital, we're changing that.

WE URGENTLY NEED FUNDS TO GROW BETTER TOGETHER AND ENSURE NO TEEN IS LEFT BEHIND

HELP US REACH MORE YOUTH

Your support will help us:

- Train more youth mentors
- Run increased weekly support groups
- Expand to reach many more adolescents at GSH

We need **R600,000** to cover costs for 1 year



Three scientific publications arising from the programme have shown both medical and mental health benefits from participation in Better Together, including **lower mortality and higher positive self-concept & resilience** (when compared to controls).

Qualitative data also found that meeting people with different illnesses was an eye opening and powerful experience for participants.

This was previously funded by One to One children's fund, but was affected by the US funding cuts. **Please consider donating** to keep this important work going.



Scan the QR Code above

DONATE TODAY www.gshtrust.co.za OR Scan the QR Code above

One to One Children's... · 2021/04/27 ... Through our collaboration with clinicians at Groote Schuur Hospital, we have developed a cross-departmental support group for adolescents with chronic illnesses, including HIV and diabetes. You can read more at oneonechildrensfund.org/adolescents-1



EVERYONE WAS SO KEEN TO TALK, WE HAD TO KEEP TELLING THEM, IT'S TIME FOR US TO END NOW!"

Concerns about peer relationships and self-image often conflict with the demands of chronic illness and treatment regimens.



Engaging the public in press

Some of the many amazing public facing publications over the past few months by NI researchers



ALCOHOL ABUSE OP-ED

South Africa is drowning in its own thirst – the health burden is catastrophic

The consequences of harmful drinking are devastating. Our road traffic fatality rate is nearly double the global average, with alcohol implicated in roughly half of those deaths.



[HIV Mental Health Research Unit](#)

Academic calls for emotional leadership in healthcare

23 JUNE 2021 | STORY STAFF WRITER, PHOTO: SUPPLIED. Read time 5 min.



[Prof Jackie Hoare](#)

Addressing South Africa's silent sleep crisis

28 AUGUST 2021 | STORY MOLISE SOPHIE, PHOTOS LENATO MADIMA. Read time 5 min.



[A/Prof Dale Rae](#)



OP-EDS

ON THE SPECTRUM OP-ED Separating fact from fiction in the search for simple explanations for Autism

How do we as the public make sense of positions on autism held by apparent authorities, based on claims of scientific evidence?



[HIV Mental Health Research Unit](#)

Episode 100: September 2025
In this episode, we hear about poison frogs, gut microbiomes and disease, queen ants and gene therapy, tapeworms and epilepsy, and the double-edged nature of trained immunity.

eLife
Episode 100 0:00 / 43:15

Elife podcast (from 24min05sec),
Brain worms: Excess glutamate produced by tapeworm larvae might cause epilepsy by overexciting brain cells, based on published [research article](#) by Anja de Lange, Hayley Tomes ... Joseph V Raimondo

Carte Blanche Investigation: The Contraceptive Question

Sphenoid wing meningiomas are invasive tumours that often grow undetected for years, causing life-altering symptoms such as dizziness, seizures, intense headaches and a loss of bodily functions. Here, they're most commonly diagnosed in women. Alarmingly, new research has revealed a possible association between these invasive tumours and a well-known contraceptive often prescribed in South Africa and widely distributed in the developing world by philanthropic organisations.



RESEARCH & INNOVATION
A Spotlight on the MNeuroSc, UCT's Most Interdisciplinary Degree

By Jess Kelly

JUN 11, 2021



DEPO-PROVERA®
and brain tumours.

CARTE blanche
You have the right to ask us.



Academic rigour, journalistic flair

Climate Arts, Culture + Society Business + Economy Education Environment + Energy Health + Medicine Politics

Violence is a normal part of life for many young children: study traces the mental health impacts

Published: November 16, 2025 7:26am SAST

By [Dr Lucinda Tsunga](#) and [Prof Kirsty Donald](#)



Waiting is not an option in the first 1000 days: How a shared approach in Cape Town helps high-risk babies



The first 1 000 days of a baby's life are vital, as their brain's malleability is at its



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Jun 09, 2025 | Comments (0)

EMPOWERING THE GLOBAL BRAIN ECONOMY: AFRICAN LEADERSHIP

THROUGH THE YAOUNDÉ DECLARATION

The Yaoundé Declaration for the Brain Economy, Brain Health, and Brain Capital marks a milestone in advancing global brain health and economic resilience for societal transformation. This declaration provides a roadmap for the transformation of the brain economy.



[Prof Graham Fiegen](#)

The Conversation, publishes articles (under creative commons) to a wide readership and only accepts articles written by academics employed at a research institution (or PhD students under supervision by an academic). They have a monthly audience of 18 million users, and a reach of 42 million through Creative Commons republication. In the last five years, over 3,500 academics and researchers have published nearly 5,500 articles. Contributions have come from 174 universities and research institutions on the continent. Sign up to become an author [here](#), with Contact Hayley for writing support!



Our 2025 Graduates

Congratulations to the following students, supervised by NI members, who graduated in March or September of 2025!

Our 2025 Honours and MNeuroSc students will graduate in March 2026!!!

2025 MSc

Anjé-Loré Callaghan (nee Grobler) Are maternal symptoms of depression/PTSD and child genetic risk scores for depression/PTSD associated with childhood subcortical brain volumes? (with distinction), *Mary Mufford, Nynke Groenewold & Dan Stein*

Batsi Ziki Meta-learning adaptive intrinsic reward weighting for curiosity-driven reinforcement learning, *Jonathan Shock & Dries Smit*

Ilyas Amien Using single nucleus RNA-seq to determine the effect of immunosuppression on the transcriptional activity of resident CNS cells in a mouse model of CNS TB, *Dorit Hockman, Muazzam Jacobs & Joseph Raimondo*

Nimra Khan Investigating the potential diagnostic role of blood serum-based biomarkers of brain injury in paediatric tuberculous meningitis patients, *Ursula Rohlwink*

Sagel Kundieko Investigating gene expression differences in acute and organotypic mouse brain slices as models for studying the brain, *Joseph Raimondo*

2025 MMed

Andrew Appiah-Baden The impact of barbiturate therapy in children with severe traumatic brain injury, *Anthony Figaji & Nqobile Thango*

Martin Kiriinya Outcomes of mechanical thrombectomy at a single-centre tertiary level public health care hospital in South Africa, *Allan Taylor, David Le Feuvre & Kathleen Bateman*

Thembani Hina Assessment of brain oxygenation (PbO2) and perfusion imaging for diagnosing brain death in children with severe TBI, *Anthony Figaji*

Tomson Katungi Mortality and associated risk factors among patients with myelomeningocele undergoing surgical closure at RCWMCH, *Graham Fieggen, Johannes Enslin & Anthony Figaji*



Our 2025 Graduates

2025 MA

Alexia Ovadia A grounded theory exploration of how young Autistic adults assigned female at birth make meaning of friendships, *Susan Malcolm-Smith & Maxine Spedding*

Tim Bean Identifying risk and resilience factors for brain age in heavy episodic drinkers in a South African context, *Jonathan Ipser & Leigh Schrieff-Brown*

2025 MPhil

Faith Mosha Implications of access to genetic testing in children with Dravet Syndrome, *Jo Wilmshurst & Alina Esterhuizen*

Quetoline Gwendoline Kandawasvika Expression of Charcot Marie Tooth diseases in Southern African children, *Jo Wilmshurst & Sharika Raga*

Rasmita Ori Using the Montreal Cognitive Assessment Test to screen for low cognitive performance in HIV positive heavy episodic alcohol users, *Jonathan Ipser & John Joska*

2025 PhD

Arron Correia Sleep under stress: The complex web of fear, hypervigilance and mental health in a low socioeconomic status community in South Africa, *Dale Rae, Gosia Lipinska, Laurie Rauch & Laura Roden*

Caitlyn Mahony Mitochondrial mechanisms in Autism Spectrum Disorder: Characterising the neurotoxic effects of propionic acid *in vitro*, *Colleen O'Ryan*

Catherine Wedderburn Neurodevelopmental effects of HIV exposure: a prospective neuroimaging study of uninfected children born to mothers living with HIV, *Kirsty Donald, Shunmay Yeung & Diana Gibb*

Isaac Khobo Exploring the relationship between multimodal magnetic resonance neuroimaging and cognitive outcomes in children: Applying machine learning algorithms to brain MRI features to predict cognitive scores and performance categories of children living with and without HIV, *Frances Robertson & Ernesta Meintjes*



Our 2025 Graduates

Lihle Bayavuya Moyakhe Genetic and epigenetic associations with child development and mental health in a South African birth cohort, *Nastassja Koen, Shareefa Dalvie & Dan Stein*

Marc Hendricks Malignant extracranial germ cell tumours, teratomas and sex cord Stromal tumours in children: Moving towards a standardised national South African treatment approach, *Kirsty Donald, Mariana Kruger & Lindsay A. Frazier*

Mashudu Mokhithi A Mixes Methods case study of mathematical thinking workshops in first-year university mathematics, *Jonathan Shock, Anita Campbell & Pragashni Padayachee*

Philippa Forshaw Towards an understanding of the relationship between sleep and cardiovascular disease risk in adults of African descent living in a low socioeconomic status community, *Dale Rae, Vicki Lambert & Laura Roden*

Phophi Tshavhungwe Drug recovery in paediatric Tuberculous Meningitis, *Anthony Figaji, Ursula Rohlwink & Jill Combrinck*

Stijn de Leeuw Early socioemotional development: Investigating protective factors that support resilience in a South African birth cohort study, *Susan Malcolm-Smith*

Veena Kander Paediatric electroencephalography in sub-Saharan Africa: Access to effective services, training capacity and applicability of teaching modules, *Jo Wilmshurst & Joanne Hardman*



The NI at UCT Summer school 2026

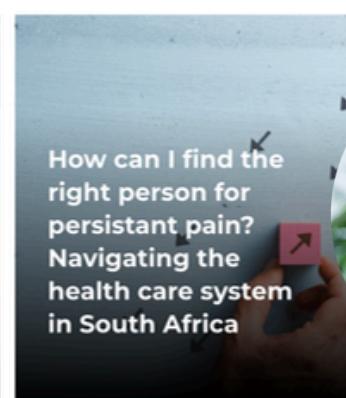
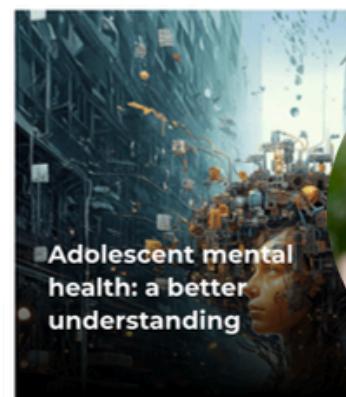
BIGGER, HOTTER and NERDIER than ever - the [**Hot Topics In Neuroscience**](#) series is back by popular demand!!

Five thought-provoking lectures (and a panel discussion) at the forefront of academia, but accessible to the public to further knowledge about the brain and brain health!

- NI presenters will intrigue audiences **January 26th - 30th**
- Lectures each morning (**9:15 - 10:15 am**)
- **LT1, Kramer Law Building**, Middle Campus.
- Persistant Pain panel event (1pm, LT2, Kramer Law Building, Middle Campus)



[more info](#)





Start of 2026 celebration

This year brought many challenges, of global proportions, and we applaud all for the act of 'carrying on' (in true South African fashion); the quietly brave moments spent finding creative ways to save as many staff positions as possible, fighting for funding to be re-instated, and for making things happen for the patients and participants wherever possible!



That said, 2026 is truly looking to be something of a special year for the Neuroscience Institute with many exciting developments to be communicated in due course.

As such we have opted to forgo the usual end of year celebration in favour of a "Start of the Year Jol' with all the renewed energy that 2026 will bring! So, we cordially invite all NI members and students to save-the-date for our START OF THE YEAR JOL!!

- **Friday 6th February 2026**
- NI Atrium (temporarily transformed into a mini golf course)

Best of ... call for 2025 nominations

Please submit nominations for the NI's annual prize categories [HERE](#). You may nominate as many people as you like, no later than Friday 9th January. Description of categories below.

Best 2025 publication by an NI member: The first or last author needs to be a member of the NI. The paper must list the NI as an affiliate organisation. It can be published or 'accepted for publication' in 2025.

Best 2025 STUDENT publication: The student must be first author and one of the other authors must be a member of the NI. The paper must list the NI as an affiliate organisation. It can be published or 'accepted for publication' in 2025.

Best Neuroscience Citizen: The person who has contributed the most to enriching neuroscience knowledge in the public sphere in 2025. For example, through public engagement events, talks or radio interviews.

Service Excellence Award: A staff member who has demonstrated, for example, one or more of the following: initiatives that enable an inclusive culture of excellence in the NI, developed practices that enhance the delivery of services to staff and students across the NI, has contributed to projects or activities that span across disciplines, has made meaningful contributions to the day-to-day operations of the NI, has contributed to the visibility of NI research.



Cheers from the core team!



May your preregistered hypotheses remain miraculously aligned with your final results;

May your datasets be expansive, impeccably curated, and only fashionably biased;

May your models converge decisively, without catastrophic forgetting—or reviewer-mandated retraining;

May your references resolve to real papers, written by real humans, in journals that still exist;

And may you always remember to replace the em dash with a hyphen, lest you be flagged by an overzealous detector and declared—incorrectly but confidently—artificially intelligent 😊

And through it all, may you retain a sense of humour,
whilst contributing to the growth of neuroscience on the continent.