



Africa Cancer Institute: Researchers and clinicians have access to high quality radiation technology equipment such as the Elekta Linear accelerator

The African Cancer Institute (ACI) was launched in November 2013 by Stellenbosch University (SU) to assist South Africa and other African countries to build capacity, provide education and training, and promote national and international collaboration in the field of cancer.

Improving cancer prevention, diagnosis and management

The ACI will be situated in SU's Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS) and aims to conduct high-level cancer research that will contribute to improving the prevention, diagnosis and management of cancer in Africa.

“There is a critical need for interventions that will help prevent cancer and improve access to treatment and care of patients with cancer on the African continent,” said Prof Jimmy Volmink, Dean of the FMHS. “Cancer is a neglected disease in Africa. We are sleepwalking into a tsunami of cancer which is going to be quite devastating.”

“Most cancers are treatable and many are curable. Yet many people in Africa do not have access to basic diagnostic and treatment facilities. This is unacceptable and we need global advocacy to address this,” Volmink said.

Collaborating to combat cancer

Cancer research is done not only at the FMHS, but also in seven other faculties of the university across a wide range of departments, divisions and units.

“By consolidating our efforts under a single umbrella, we are taking it to a new level. This makes SU the leading entity in South Africa in terms of cancer research,” said Prof Eugene Cloete, Vice-Rector: Research of SU.

The newly appointed Director of the ACI, Prof Vikash Sewram, said cancer is a significant contributor to non-communicable disease morbidity and mortality in Africa, whilst in South Africa it is already the sixth leading cause of mortality and a public health problem of considerable magnitude.

“Most cancers are treatable and many are curable. Yet many people in Africa do not have access to basic diagnostic and treatment facilities. This is unacceptable and we need global advocacy to address this.” - Prof Jimmy Volmink, Dean of Stellenbosch University’s Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences

Sewram said the aim of the ACI was to become an internationally recognised comprehensive cancer research centre, conducting and coordinating multidisciplinary research relevant to Africa. “The ACI will also provide a strong platform for scholarly growth and knowledge production in pursuit of high-quality evidence-based cancer care. Research at the ACI will cut across the cancer continuum – spanning prevention, screening, early detection, diagnosis, treatment or palliative care,” he said.

Volmink emphasised the importance of collaboration, saying the ACI aims to be a champion for combating cancer on the African continent. “We can do this even better if we partner effectively with other institutions in South Africa, Africa and globally who share our vision,” he said.

“The establishment of the African Cancer Institute will not only facilitate a more extensive platform for cancer and cancer related research in South Africa and the African continent, but will also provide opportunities to address the concerning limitations in resource development and community services. As a leading non-profit organisation in cancer control and research, CANSA is very grateful for the opportunity to partake in this very exciting initiative created by Stellenbosch University, that will surely have a positive impact on the increasing cancer burden in Africa and South Africa in particular,” added Ms Sue Janse van Rensburg, CEO of the Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA).

The ACI has already signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the prestigious University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. This MOU will facilitate collaboration in developing training programmes, faculty exchanges, specific oncology courses and collaborative research projects to advance the understanding of cancer and improving cancer care.

"MD Anderson is proud to partner with the African Cancer Institute on our shared mission of eradicating cancer, and looks forward to working together on joint initiatives to build capacity for advanced cancer care in Africa,” said Dr Oliver Bogler, Senior Vice President, Academic Affairs at the MD Anderson Cancer Center.

“Cancer shows vast diversity across the geographic, ethnic, racial and cultural spectrum around the world. We are excited about the new opportunities to advance our understanding of cancer with the launch of the African Cancer Institute at Stellenbosch University,” said Dr Shubhra Ghosh, Project Director of Global Academic Programs at the MD Anderson Cancer Center.

For more information, visit www.sun.ac.za/acilaunch