

**Inaugural Speech by Founding Director, Professor Vikash Sewram
Launch of the African Cancer Institute at the UICC World Cancer Leaders' Summit
Gala Dinner, Castle of Good Hope, Monday, 18 November 2013**

To Her Excellency – Madame Tobeka Zuma, First Lady of SA, Her Excellency, Dr Christine Kaseba Sata, First Lady of Zambia, Distinguished Guests and all protocols observed.

I am enormously pleased to celebrate with you all, this momentous occasion of Stellenbosch University in the launch of the African Cancer Institute. The determination of the University to not just harness the collaborative intellect of individuals, groups and institutions within SA, but rather to transcend regional and international boundaries in the interests of the whole of Africa points the way to a broader and brighter future horizon for the African Nation and to rejuvenate and recommit to our fight against cancer.

It is a substantial, ambitious and demanding agenda for our health-related programmes to reach all of Africa in a single wave and to the same extent, however through the ethos of Stellenbosch University and the ACI, our activities will be seen as nodes in a broad, regional framework, reaching from Cape Town to Nairobi, from Dhaka to the Congo and from Kigali to Namibia. Our Vision at the ACI is to reduce the burden of cancer and improve subsequent health outcomes amongst the African population.

The Goals of the Institute are to:

1. To promote, co-ordinate and facilitate cancer and cancer-related research.
2. To strengthen basic, clinical, translational and interdisciplinary research.
3. To assist in developing learner-centric educational and training programs with curricula related to cancer and public health; and
4. To become a Centre of Excellence for cancer research and training in South Africa and the African Continent.

The goals I share with you today are integral to ACI's Vision. Such long term planning is not easy. Overburdened national health care, understandably, are often hypnotized by immediate crisis situations. But we cannot allow the system as a whole to be obsessed only with the short-term. For all of us, thrusting ourselves to the medical frontiers in unravelling the intricacies of this disease represents a compelling priority. A recent study by the International Finance Corporation - describes what they call a "global travesty"- the fact that Sub-Saharan Africa - with 11 percent of the world's population - bears 24 percent of the global burden of disease. And yet Sub-Saharan Africa presently accounts for only one percent of global health expenditures. A "global travesty" indeed!

With this in mind, we need to discover or construct innovative ways to ensure we have a healthier population hence research and education remain key hallmarks in this endeavour and integral to the ACI's activities. The intimate link between quality research and quality health care is well established. Productive research needs to be rooted, amongst others, in patient-based experience, even as sound practice must be informed by new knowledge. The two dimensions are mutually dependent. This combination of informed practice and creative research will also provide an ideal context for superior health education - and thus for building an expanded corps of accomplished cancer scientists, clinicians, public health professionals and advocates here in Africa. Let us put behind the day when young Africans

thought they had to go to other parts of the world for quality health education - and then, too often, they stayed abroad. Similarly, let the day also pass when African patients think they must go to other parts of the world to find quality health care.

Hence the projects at the ACI will be aimed at:

1. Providing a greater understanding of the aetiology of cancer within South Africa and the African Continent;
2. Improving risk profiling for surveillance and monitoring;
3. Fostering innovative approaches for integrative cancer medicine;
4. Developing cost-effective and readily available diagnostic and prognostic technologies;
5. Discovering new therapies and enhancing current therapies for cancer treatment;
6. Increasing research capacity and the technical skills of our scientists, clinicians and other health care professionals;
7. Ensuring knowledge dissemination and public awareness around cancer prevention and management; and finally,
8. Evidence-based policy formulation for cancer prevention, management and control.

Indeed, this will be a bracing challenge - involving not only the University - but also a wide array of cooperating partners, government, and other medical institutions. We are proud to have established a partnership with the University of Texas MDACC and the CANSA at the onset. This is just the beginning of a long array of partnerships that we envisage forging as we embark on this journey. Indeed, let me be frank in saying that without such partnerships and collaborations our solidly founded initiatives for the future would be all but slender dreams.

The ACI represents a critical investment in the people of this region. We hope that future generations will look back on this moment - much as we look back to earlier steps along the way - and see that the work we undertake today does indeed mark an important benchmark on the path to a happier and healthier future and towards a cancer free Africa.

My thanks to you all for sharing in this memorable moment with us.

Thank you

Vikash Sewram