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**NOVARTIS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH UCT LUNG INSTITUTE AND THE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH LAUNCHES MOBILE TB DIAGNOSIS CLINIC**

Novartis, UCT Lung Institute and Department of Health commit to finding missing persons who may be living with Tuberculosis (TB)

Cape Town, 19 April 2022 – Tuberculosis (TB) remains one of the leading causes of death in South Africa and the ninth leading cause worldwide, killing someone almost every 21 seconds¹.

In 2018, 63 000 people died of the infectious disease and it kills on average 60 000 – 70 000 people every year, which is similar to the number of deaths caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa. The pandemic has also resulted in a dramatic drop in the number of diagnosed TB cases around the world, with testing rates decreasing by almost 50%², resulting in many cases going undiagnosed and untreated.

The Department of Health (DoH), the UCT Lung Institute and Novartis today announced their commitment to finding missing persons who may be living with TB with the launch of a ‘lab-in-a-cab’ mobile clinic in Cape Town.

This community-based active case finding initiative aims to screen about 25 000 – 30 000 participants in the Klipfontein and Mitchells Plain districts with plans to roll it out to other areas in Cape Town later this year.

The mobile clinic was developed by UCT academics and features an active case-finding package XACT (Xpert for Active Case Finding), which enables early detection of infectious cases and takes molecular diagnostics (the technique used to diagnose and monitor a disease) out of the laboratory and into the community. Mobile clinics are much better suited for peri-urban, densely populated communities than the labour-intensive door-to-door screening approach.

“We are aiming to identify patients with active TB before transmission can occur. This is a necessary and critical intervention if we are to have any hope of controlling TB in communities that are socio-economically disadvantaged and have a high burden of TB and HIV. We believe that the mobile and point-of-care package of intervention will revolutionize and set a new standard of care for community-based active case finding,” said Professor Keertan Dheda from the UCT Lung Institute.

Patients will receive the results of their diagnostic tests immediately, reducing the number of undiagnosed cases and enabling patients to initiate TB treatment on the same day. This strategy reduces the number of untreated patients lost to follow-up consultations, which can be as high as 20-40% in a high burdened community.

¹ <https://lunginstitute.co.za/2020/08/03/uct-researchers-are-finding-missing-tb-patients-with-new-improved-technology/>

² <https://www.news24.com/health24/Medical/Infectious-diseases/Coronavirus/covid-19-lockdown-takes-heavy-toll-on-sas-tb-response-20200521-4>

The Institute diagnosed a staggering 10% (520 individuals out of 5,200) with TB following recent screening tests performed in the Klipfontein district. “This extraordinarily high pick-up rate shows the efficacy of the model,” Professor Dheda added.

Novartis has a long-standing commitment to improving and extending the lives of patients around the world. The company has played a significant role in the fight against TB in South Africa. The Swiss headquartered pharmaceutical multinational has made medicines available to patients in the public sector to treat MDR-TB. The medicine has been tailored to meet patient needs such as minimizing the burden of treatment.

“We aim to develop innovative products in growing areas of healthcare. Our efforts include seeking ways to improve the standard of care where possible. We are excited by this important collaboration with UCT and the Department of Health. It has the potential to improve efficacy of the diagnosis and treatment of TB in South Africa and in so doing lessen the spread and save many lives,” added Shelley Horner, Country President and General Manager Oncology at Novartis South Africa.

In addition to the TB screening, HIV testing is also conducted. This has resulted in many new HIV diagnoses, which also addresses the second most important long-standing infectious disease in South Africa. The same diagnostic PCR testing platform can also accommodate a SARS-CoV-2 cartridge which means COVID-19 testing can take place in parallel.

Researchers also found evidence that many patients have minimal, or no symptoms yet are transmitting TB in the community, like persons with COVID-19 who are asymptomatic or have minimal symptoms³. By the time patients present themselves for treatment 95% of transmission has already occurred. Based on these discoveries it is suggested that to lessen the spread of TB, scientists need to shift targeted interventions to patients with minimal TB symptoms, particularly those in vulnerable communities.

More than 20 000 people in South Africa will be screened using this technology which is currently being trialled. With the use of this model, infectious cases are detected early, and transmission is lessened. This model can also in future be used to screen for other critical diseases such as diabetes.

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³ <https://lunginstitute.co.za/2020/08/03/uct-researchers-are-finding-missing-tb-patients-with-new-improved-technology/>

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About The University of Cape Town

The University of Cape Town Lung Institute (UCTLI) is a private company wholly owned by the University of Cape Town. Our mandate is to address priority health issues through Education, Research and Service. Our headquarters are located on Hospital Bend adjacent to the UCT Faculty of Health Sciences. We provide clinical services and conduct research in the fields of Respiratory Medicine, Tuberculosis, COVID-19, Allergy and Lipidology. Our team of over 200 academics, scientists, clinicians, trialists, support staff and primary health care workers are focussed on our mandate. Our services include; evaluation of new TB treatments and investigating new TB diagnostics in adults and children. We have a strong focus on community based interventions and our treatment and diagnostic research focus is on diseases of poverty. The extended research platform at the UCTLI also conducts COVID-19 vaccine and COVID-19 treatment interventions. Our team also offers a limited private practice service in Allergy and Respiratory Medicine. We work closely with our partners at the UCT Faculty of Health Sciences and use our extended platform to facilitate student and postgraduate training. The UCTLI collaborates widely with higher training institutions and research entities elsewhere in South Africa, on the African continent and abroad.

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