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## **UCT Autism Centre honoured with double international awards for outstanding research**

A University of Cape Town (UCT) interdisciplinary team, the Centre for Autism Research in Africa (CARA), led by Prof Petrus de Vries, Professor of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry at UCT, recently received two prestigious international awards for their research in autism spectrum disorder.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental that is associated with difficulties in social interaction and communication, and a pattern of repetitive and ritualistic behaviours. ASD is recognized by the World Health Organization as a global public health concern, but in Africa very little research has been done and clinical services for families who live with ASD are extremely limited.

The International Society for Autism Research (INSAR) awarded the CARA team the inaugural Cultural Diversity Research Award "to recognize and support investigators or teams who conduct community-based or community-partnered research that leaves a lasting impact on under-served and under-researched communities." The award was made at the Society's May 2018 conference in Rotterdam.

Prof de Vries commented: "I was delighted by this international recognition of the outstanding work done by my wonderful team. We really believe that research is about working together and collaborating with passionate and positive international partners. Without this teamwork none of our work or achievements would be possible".

At the same conference, Prof de Vries was one of the first group of researchers elected as INSAR Fellow. The Fellowship is awarded "to honour distinguished members of INSAR whose research has made a significant international impact on the scientific understanding of autism spectrum disorder, clinical practice, educational methods, and/or policy."

Prof Dan Stein, Head of the Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health at UCT said: "These awards speak to the tremendous work that the Division of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry has initiated in this key area."

“I am delighted by the international recognition of our autism research, but given the enormous burden of ASD, particularly in Africa and other low-resource settings, we all have much to do!,” de Vries concluded.

This remarkable achievement speaks to UCT’s goal of being a research intensive university with the aim of producing new solutions to challenges facing the African continent and the world.



Prof de Vries (centre) with members of CARA and Prof Simon Baron-Cohen (right), President of INSAR at the Award Ceremony in the Netherlands.

**ENDS**

***Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department***

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