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Young UCT scientist joins top fellowship to advance TB research

Emerging scientist from the University of Cape Town (UCT), Mandy Mason, is one of five scientists to be selected from around Africa among the first cohort of the prestigious Crick African Network (CAN) fellows. The scientist is looking forward to broadening her network and knowledge in the field of Tuberculosis (TB).

Said Mason: "I'm thrilled and honoured to be invited to be one of the first fellows. It promises to be a tight-knit group of young academics and I'm looking forward to moving ahead with the programme."

Mason, who is based at UCT's Institute for Infectious Diseases and Molecular Medicine is aware of the huge need to crack open new ways to both prevent and treat TB, which is the leading cause of death in South Africa. Treatment for tuberculosis is very long and needs to be taken for at least six months.

"TB is a disease that disproportionately affects vulnerable populations in South Africa, and results in an incredible burden of suffering on people who are already in difficult socio-economic circumstances. I hope, through my work, to contribute in some way to effect a shortened and durable cure for this disease," added Mason.

Of interest to Mason is that the awards are designed to help early-career researchers make the transition to leading their own research groups in Africa. Her research centres on improving understanding of the biology of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* (Mtb), the bacterium that causes TB.

Professor Robert Wilkinson, CAN director, commented: "It is important for early-career scientists on the continent to become part of a community of African researchers that works towards common goals to tackle diseases of poverty. Science is not done in isolation. They all learn from each other."

By investigating a wide range of bacteria with mutations, Mason hopes to find some that are more susceptible to being killed by both new and existing drugs.

Mason is joined in the fellowship by other fellows at the Crick Institute's five CAN partner institutions: UCT and Stellenbosch University, the UK Medical Research Council/Uganda Virus Research Institute and London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine Uganda

Research Unit, the University of Ghana and the Medical Research Council Unit in the Gambia, which also represents the West African Global Health Alliance.

The fellows will work on projects which include improving strategies for the control and spread of malaria, a focus on children who get TB repeatedly to understand if genetic causes make them more prone to developing the active disease and understanding the strains of HIV that are circulating in West Africa.

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