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## **UCT researcher recognised for putting spotlight on cervical cancer**

University of Cape Town (UCT) Professor Lynette Denny, who has been researching methods of cervical cancer prevention among poor women for 25 years, says coalescing the areas of policy, resources, research and screening is essential to changing the status quo. Cervical cancer is significantly higher among black women in South Africa.

“Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer among women in the country, after breast cancer, yet it is preventable through mass screening – and early detection saves lives,” says Professor Denny, a senior specialist in gynaecological oncology in the Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology at UCT and Groote Schuur Hospital.

Professor Denny says the situation in South Africa is worrisome. “Major impediments are access to healthcare and prioritising mass cervical cancer screening programmes,” she says. Most of the affected women are poor with limited access to healthcare. The most common age group is 40 to 50 years.

The significance of this is that at this age black women are often heads of households and sole breadwinners. “Work is also needed to develop modern, accessible and accurate diagnostic tests and treatment,” she says.

Professor Denny has been researching methods for cancer prevention among poor women since 1995. She is one of the continent’s foremost scholars in this field.

Her major achievements have been in the areas of gynaecological oncology, particularly cervical cancer, and screening, particularly in a primary care context. She has established major research programmes that have attracted considerable research funding. In addition, she has made a significant contribution to UCT’s Gender, Health and Justice Unit.

Professor Denny’s 25-year body of research on cervical cancer has won a prestigious South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) Gold Medal in its golden jubilee year. The medal recognises her as an outstanding South African scientist, whose excellent research has raised the profile of science in the country.

The SAMRC medals are among South Africa’s most prestigious, and are dedicated to contributions to health research in South Africa. Gold medals are awarded annually to

established senior scientists for seminal scientific contributions that have impacted on the health of people, especially those living in developing countries.

Of the SAMRC award, Professor Denny says: "It is a great honour and acknowledgement of 25 years of work in cervical cancer research." She used the award to make a plea for greater awareness of and efforts to detect the disease.

Professor Denny has also played a crucial role in developing the Western Cape protocol for the management of survivors of sexual assault.



Senior specialist in gynaecological oncology Prof Lynette Denny

**Photo:** Michael Hammond

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