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7 June 2019

Outstanding UCT scientist to develop two new TB research areas after winning R1.5m Oppenheimer Fellowship award

University of Cape Town's Professor Valerie Mizrahi, who is the recipient of the prestigious Harry Oppenheimer Fellowship Award for 2018 for her research into tuberculosis (TB), plans to use the award worth R1.5 million to develop two new areas of research which are built on expertise in the biology of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* as it relates to TB pathogenesis and drug discovery.

Professor Mizrahi is the 21st recipient of the award since its inception and the ninth from UCT.

The projects she intends developing will also serve as the vehicle for advanced training of talented, next-generation TB researchers who are able to work at an internationally competitive pace and standard.

"I'm excited about how the Oppenheimer Fellowship will support this research and the development of new researchers.

"Just as my work has been enabled by others, so I too hope to continue to enable younger researchers. In a very real sense, I am nothing without the people who have worked with me. The Oppenheimer Fellowship is not mine. I have had fantastic people who have dedicated years of their lives to this type of work. This award is as much theirs as it is mine because that is how science works," she said.

The field of TB research is desperately in need of innovative approaches – TB is now the largest cause of death in the world from any infectious disease and imposes a particular burden on South Africa.

Mizrahi has been one of the pioneers of applying modern molecular biological technologies to understanding the requirements for growth and pathogenesis of the *tubercle bacillus* ([a](#)

[bacterium \(*Mycobacterium tuberculosis*\) that is a major cause of tuberculosis](#)). She is an outstanding researcher in the basic science of tuberculosis in Africa and widely recognised as an international leader in the field.

The Fellowship comes with monetary value of R1.5 million and ranks as the Oppenheimer Memorial Trust's premier annual award. It is a special investment to encourage and acknowledge excellence in scholarship in all disciplines.

Professor Mizrahi is the Director of the Institute of Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine (IDM) at UCT, a member of the TB Programme Scientific Advisory Committee of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and was interim Chair of its 'Discovery Expert Group' in 2017. She is a member of the Science Interview Panel of the Wellcome Trust, and a member of the Scientific Advisory Board of the 'TB Human Challenge Model Consortium', Harvard School of Public Health.

She has won numerous awards, including the SA Medical Research Council's Platinum Achievement Award (2017), the Prix Christophe Merieux (2013), Order of Mapungubwe (Silver, 2007), the SA Society for Biochemistry & Molecular Biology Gold Medal (2006), Department of Science & Technology Distinguished Women Scientist Award (2006) and the UNESCO-L'Oreal Prize for Women in Science, Africa and Middle East Region (2000) – amongst others.

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Professor Valerie Mizrahi

Credit: Robyn Walker/UCT

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Note to editors:

The Harry Oppenheimer Fellowship Award was initiated by the Oppenheimer Memorial Trust in 2001 to commemorate the Trust's founder and all he stood for, especially his

efforts to support human and intellectual development, advance scholarship and encourage innovative ideas. The Trust has a long tradition of investing in education and many beneficiaries have gone on to make important contributions to South African public life. The Fellowship builds on and expands this tradition and, with a monetary value of R1.5 million, ranks as the Trust's premier annual award. It is a special investment to encourage and acknowledge excellence in scholarship in all disciplines and in all its forms and serves to acknowledge cutting-edge, internationally significant work that has particular application to the advancement of knowledge, teaching, research and development in South Africa.

Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

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