



Associate Professor Ursula Rohlwink

Associate Professor, Division of Neurosurgery

Ursula Rohlwink is an Associate Professor and Wellcome Trust International Intermediate Fellow based in the African Brain Child Initiative (ABC) in Paediatric Neurosurgery at Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital, and at the University of Cape Town's (UCT) Neuroscience Institute (NI). She has a strong focus on high-level research that addresses major clinical challenges that face children in Africa and across the globe. Traumatic brain injury (TBI) and tuberculosis (TB) represent two of the greatest childhood burdens of disease. Together with the ABC Initiative Ursula is committed to investigating how the developing brain responds to injury through trauma and infection by combining the principles of brain physiology, pathophysiology (including immunology, metabolism, and genetics) and neurocritical care with the aim to reduce the impact of these diseases on affected children. In this pursuit she has contributed to the development of one of the world's most sophisticated multi-modality brain monitoring units and to the generation of rich clinical datasets, she has conducted complex -omics analysis using local resources and in collaboration with prestigious international institutions. Ursula is committed to building local capacity for truly translational bench-to-bedside research through infrastructure development, training, and education. In January 2018 she was awarded one of the four founding fellowships in the NI. In the same year she received the USA National Neurotrauma Society TEAM Women in Neuroscience Visiting International Scholar Grant to work with colleagues at John's Hopkins Medicine (JHM). In 2020 she was a recipient of the prestigious Crick-African Network Accelerator Award, which aimed to support promising young African scientists to become independent researchers. In 2022, Ursula secured a Wellcome Trust International Intermediate Fellowship to further her research on unravelling the mechanisms of brain injury in children with tuberculous meningitis (TBM).

She organises an annual International Brain Awareness Week event during which the NI hosts Grade 7 learners from underprivileged communities and provides a day of hands-on practicals and interactive talks. The goal is exposing learners to the wonders of the brain and impart the joys of scientific inquiry. In the interest of expanding the continental reach of high-level neuroscience, she hosted for the first time in Africa in its 50-year history, the International Symposium of Intracranial Pressure and Brain Monitoring.

She considers herself fortunate to work at the crossroad of neuroscience and infectious disease (two of the great scientific and clinical frontiers), to contribute to a strong and dedicated clinical-research enterprise, and to have been the recipient of outstanding mentorship, with special mention of Professor Tony Figaji, Head of Paediatric Neurosurgery and Director of ABC.