



## Professor Liesl Zühlke


### Professor of paediatric cardiology Faculty of Health Sciences

Professor Liesl Zühlke is a leading paediatric cardiology clinician scientist in South Africa, the first paediatric cardiologist to achieve a PhD and the only woman full professor of paediatric cardiology in South Africa. Professor Zühlke is an internationally recognised researcher in the fields of Rheumatic and Congenital Heart Disease (RHD and CHD), as well as in Global Health with over 180 publications, more than 51 000 citations, 11 authored books and book chapters, and 25 post-graduate supervisions (19 graduated and 6 enrolled) across multiple disciplines.

Prof Zühlke has been substantially involved in almost every major RHD research project and intervention since 2010, when she commenced her research work in this area. Her work in RHD spans basic science, clinical research and public health and has resulted in significant new knowledge, recognised globally. Most importantly, her research, work and impact has resulted in significant outcomes impacting the health of people. She was instrumental in the World Heart Federation (WHF) guidelines to diagnose RHD in asymptomatic populations, now adopted across all countries; published a report on the gaps in evidence-based interventions in RHD patients; and was a key contributor to the passing of a landmark resolution against RHD by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2018, following the Addis Ababa communiqué in 2016. She has engaged with governments to improve the management, treatment, and outcomes of patients with RHD, through small, high-impact grants, engaging with ministries of health and developing patient and health workers modules to improve care. She is one of the foremost thought leaders in RHD globally and has worked alongside RHD patients and families to impact outcomes.

Zühlke's research and academic activities in CHD have highlighted the data gap in the area. She published data on burden of CHD in Africa (most impactful journal article in 2019 in CHD) and accrued the largest grant for CHD research in Africa to understand the clinical, genetic and long-term profile for patients with CHD. Publications already span basic science to clinical epidemiology and inextricably link research to clinical management with subsequent effects on quality improvement, evidence-based outputs and improved outcomes. This has carried through into a unique clinic for teenage patients with CHD and active quality improvements with Namibia replicating these efforts.

Since her work with RHD and CHD impacts significantly on the agenda of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) and Global Health, Zühlke has made a natural progression into these fields. As a board member of both the WHF and the Non-Communicable Disease Alliance (NCDA), she is instrumental in setting and developing strategic agendas in this field. She has published on Global Health issues, including health workforce needs, medical training, the issue of inclusivity in publishing and the inclusion of patients in health decisions.



She is a multi-award winner, having been recognised with the following awards: African Research Leader 2018, the National Research Foundation 2020 for public engagement with science, 2021 University of Cape Town Alan Pifer, 2022 Metrodora for Public Leader in Science and Medicine, the 2022 T Duckett Jones Lecture and Young Hearts Award. She was also awarded the prestigious Fellowship of the American Heart Association: FAHA in 2023.