



# DIVISION OF NEUROLOGY

The leading neurology unit in sub-Saharan Africa



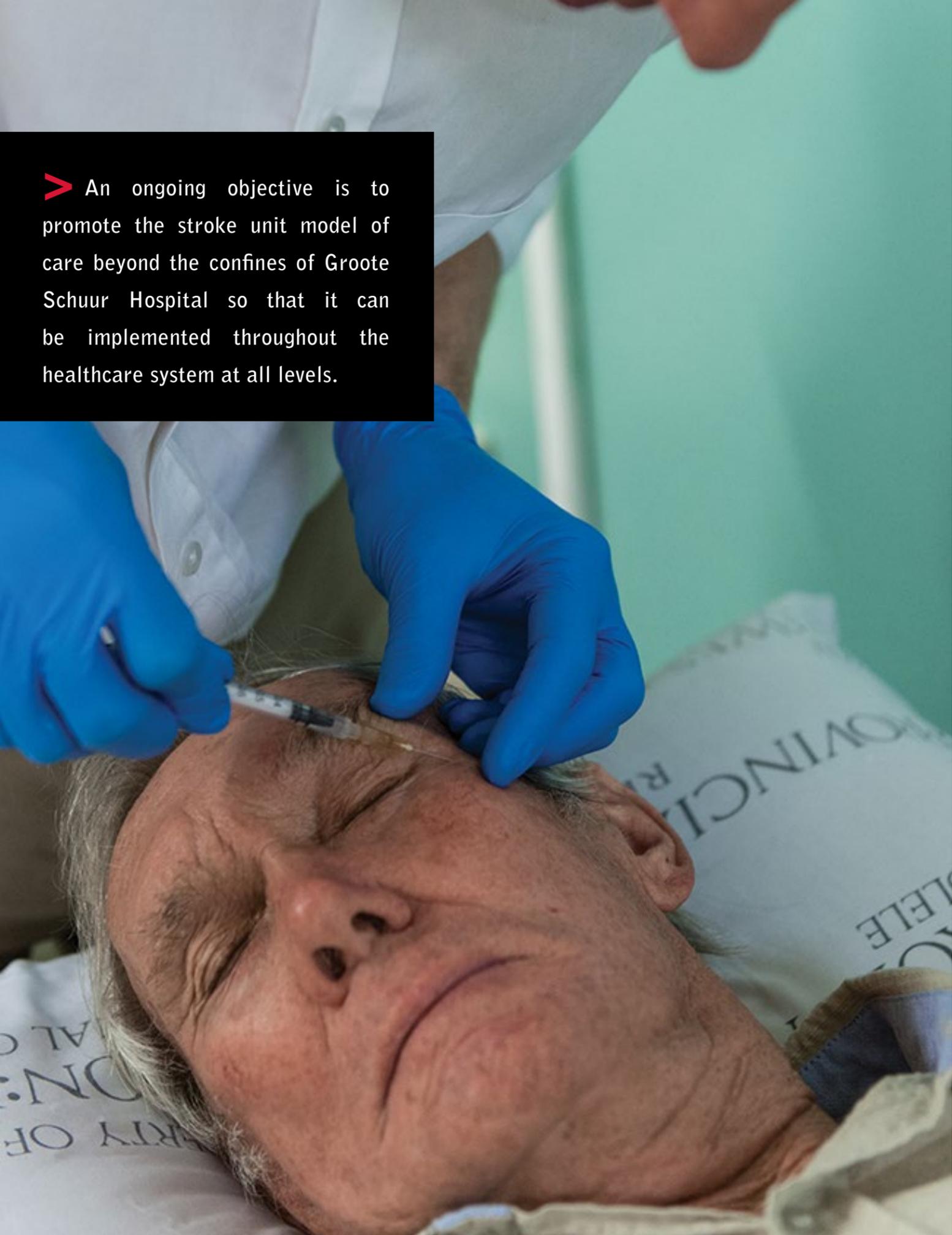
## Professor Alan Bryer Head of Neurology

Professor Alan Bryer, Head of Neurology at Groote Schuur, will tell you that if you are unfortunate enough to have any neurological problems such as suffer a stroke, the best thing you could do would be to get yourself to Groote Schuur hospital.

“My colleagues in the neurology division based at Groote Schuur are among the most talented neurologists in the country, each with their own unique skill set and expertise,” says Professor Bryer. “This enables us to collectively look at creative and innovative ways of dealing with the challenges of improving our three platforms of activity, namely: providing the best possible clinical service, under- and postgraduate teaching, and research.”

Professor Bryer makes special mention of Doctor Eddy Lee Pan, who heads up the electrophysiology laboratory, Doctor Ross Tucker who has a special interest in epilepsy and Emeritus Professor Eric Bateman who leads research

> An ongoing objective is to promote the stroke unit model of care beyond the confines of Groote Schuur Hospital so that it can be implemented throughout the healthcare system at all levels.



and teaching in neuropathy and infectious disease, as well as Professor Jeannine Heckmann who established the first dedicated Myasthenia Gravis Clinic in South Africa and is considered the leading expert in this field. “She has conducted extensive clinical and laboratory-based research projects focusing on improving therapeutic strategies and increasing our understanding of the disease pathogenesis. She is the leader of our neuro-immunology and neuro-HIV research group and has successfully supervised several PhD and MSc (Medicine) research fellows.” says Professor Bryer.

As head of the division, Professor Bryer says that being able to attract and retain staff of the highest academic calibre has been a major achievement. “This enables us to provide excellent tertiary care to our patients with neurological conditions, but also to develop highly specialised quaternary clinics that are unique on the subcontinent.”

These clinics: the Stroke Unit; Neuro-HIV Clinic; Epilepsy Surgery Programme; Neurogenetics Clinic; Myasthenia Gravis Clinic; and Dystonia Clinic attract patients from far and wide. In addition, the centre’s in-house service has been extended to an outreach service to local hospitals such as New Somerset Hospital as well as periodic visits to the Eastern Cape.

Amongst these initiatives, Professor Bryer says that the one that he takes the most personal pride in is the stroke unit, which is the first and only comprehensive Stroke Unit in the public sector in sub-Saharan Africa. The unit has served as a model for stroke care in Southern Africa and has been involved in training staff from local hospitals and further afield including Worcester, George, Durban and Harare, Zimbabwe.

“An ongoing objective is to promote the stroke unit model of care beyond the confines of Groote Schuur Hospital so that it can be implemented



*Ward-based patient activity to improve grip strength.*

throughout the healthcare system at all levels,” he says. “One of the reasons that the unit’s model of care has not been widely implemented throughout our healthcare system has been the lack of adequately qualified personnel trained in stroke care. In conjunction with the Department of Health (DoH), we are therefore in the process of developing an effective training programme that can be used for in-service training in stroke care at all levels of the healthcare system in all provinces. This will extend our outreach capability across a much broader platform without being restricted to one or two centres.

“Our objective is to give effect to the national skills development strategy as part of the workplace skills plan. In addition to this effort there has been ongoing engagement with both policymakers and public



> Given the varied and unique skills of the staff within the unit, I am convinced that we can further enhance and establish our reputation as the leading Neurology Unit in sub-Saharan Africa.



Corien Theron, occupational therapist, assisting a patient to improve visuospatial skills.

advocacy organisations (such as the Heart and Stroke Foundation of South Africa) in order to improve stroke care and awareness widely in the country.”

Another highlight for the division has been the knowledge that the seminal work for Professor Bryer’s PhD on the spectrum and genetics of the spinocerebellar ataxias in South Africa has formed the basis for ongoing research projects in this field at both Master’s and PhD level at UCT and has also directly translated to improved clinical service by way of the implementation of a predictive testing service for these disorders that continues to be available at the Neurogenetics Clinic.

Looking forward, Professor Bryer says that the Neurology Unit at UCT will not miss a beat in continuing to provide the excellent generalised as

well as more highly specialised clinical services that are unique to the unit.

“We will ensure that the unit grows in strength in terms of research output relevant to local needs, and that it is regarded as a leader in innovative teaching methods that can be adapted and applied beyond the confines of our institution. Another objective is to foster a closer working relationship with the disciplines of neurosurgery, neuropsychology and psychiatry with a view to collaborative research activity and it is our goal that this initiative evolves into a formal neuroscience institute at our university.

“Given the varied and unique skills of the staff within the unit, I am convinced that we can further enhance and establish our reputation as the leading neurology unit in sub-Saharan Africa.”