



DIVISION OF
CARDIOLOGY

The heart of the matter



Professor Mpiko Ntsekhe
Head of Cardiology

The Division of Cardiology is the oldest dedicated clinical cardiology unit in sub-Saharan Africa. It has a rich, proud history and tradition of delivering world-class clinical service; of teaching and training some of Africa's and the world's leading cardiologists; and of making significant contributions to efforts to improve local and international cardiovascular health.

“Improving the capacity and our capability to meet the increasing needs of a rapidly growing population of people with complex cardiac conditions, who require tertiary and quaternary care, while ensuring equitable access for all patients across the province, is an important ongoing challenge that the division is trying to address,” says head of division, Professor Mpiko Ntsekhe.

He details specific solutions that are currently being implemented to improve clinical service. These include



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Professor Karen Sliwa, Director of the Hatter Institute for Cardiovascular Research in Africa.



Doctor Patrick Ntuli (senior registrar), Doctor Blanche Cupido (cardiologist), and Professor Mpiko Ntsekhe in the Cardiac Catheterisation Laboratory.

retaining, recruiting and training a team of cardiovascular health care professionals who are dedicated to clinical excellence and public sector healthcare, and who are conscious of the prevailing conditions and environment.

He also says expanding capacity to treat patients with complex disease through collaboration with colleagues from outside the public/academic sector is important, as is improving the available infrastructure, equipment and other material resources required to provide optimal patient care. The division also aims to make targeted improvements within the system of care to address issues of access for patients. Increasing collaboration across clinical academic units to enhance capacity is also a main area of activity.

In addition to contributing to teaching and training and complimentary programmes, the division also receives non-resident trainees from around the country and continent, for short focused periods.

“Research and academic excellence has been and remains central to the Division of Cardiology,” says Professor Ntsekhe. “The department has been consistently striving to improve the quality, quantity and relevance of the research output.”

The division works closely with the Hatter Institute for Cardiovascular Research in Africa, under Professor Karen Sliwa. Its impressive research and projects are geared towards consolidating and expanding existing efforts to combat the most serious cardiovascular threats to health, and to improve overall prosperity in Africa.

Professor Sliwa says recent highlights include the creation in 2010 of a dedicated cardiac disease and maternity clinic, specifically aimed at pregnant women with heart disease – a particularly common problem in Africa – and the expansion of the scope of the research that they do at the Hatter Institute to other African countries such as Cameroon, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sudan and Tanzania. Another key achievement has been the setting up a number of international registries in nine African countries, on diseases relevant to Africa. “Based on the success of these registries, I have been invited to lead a large international registry funded by the European Society of Cardiology (EuroObservational Programme). The results of these registries will provide answers to important clinical questions and will subsequently improve patient care,” says Professor Sliwa.



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The Coronary Care Unit Team (from left to right): M. Ntsekhe, B. Hlwempu, B. Cupido, F. Kasker, V. McAllister, Z. Prince, C. Viljoen, V. Bell, B. Dyantyi, A.C. Adams, S. Hoffman, C. Magerman, and H. Hadebe.

She also talks about expanding the Hatter Institute and forging strong collaborations with other laboratories. In future, she aims to establish a system where collaborators in Africa have ownership of their research data and hopes to see students achieve success in their own research fields. Student numbers at the Hatter Institute have increased from three in 2008 to 20 in 2014.

Professors Silwa and Prof Ntsekhe agree that they are united by the common aim of improving people's lives.

"Knowing that I get up and go to work with the real opportunity of contributing to making a difference to people's lives while doing what I really enjoy – clinical medicine, teaching, research is the

most exciting aspect of my job," says Professor Ntsekhe. The most challenging aspect is trying to deliver and achieve overall excellence despite the disconnect between the scope and scale of the problems and the resource capacity and infrastructural limitations at hand.

"It often feels like a heavy-weight boxing match with one hand tied behind one's back," he sums it up. Yet he remains optimistic. "I would like to create a simple legacy of running a department that consistently finds solutions that allow it to provide best patient care, teaches and trains to the highest standards and contributes to solving the countries major problems through research."