

# DIVISION OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES AND HIV MEDICINE

A key role player in the battle against HIV and TB



Professor  
Marc Mendelson  
Head of Infectious  
Diseases and  
HIV Medicine

The Division of Infectious Diseases plays a major role in the fight against HIV/AIDS and TB in the Western Cape, contributing significantly to research and helping to treat and educate poor communities about South Africa's biggest killer diseases.

“The division has grown substantially over the past few years and has come to include a weekly HIV clinic as well as outreach and support for surrounding hospitals,” says Head of Division, Professor Marc Mendelson.

The division has strong teaching capabilities and offers academic programmes for graduates and postgraduates, but it is in its research that it really shines. The Division of





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*Professor Robert Wilkinson, Wellcome Trust Senior Research Fellow in the Institute of Infectious Diseases and Molecular Medicine and the Department of Medicine.*



*Professors Robin Wood and Linda-Gail Bekker of the Desmond Tutu HIV Centre.*

Infectious Diseases has a prolific publication profile within the University of Cape Town, with one of the highest number of publications for any group within the institution.

Professor Mendelson says that this is thanks to the excellence of members of the division involved in full-time research, such as members of Professor Robin Wood and Linda-Gail Bekker's Desmond Tutu HIV Centre, Professor Robert Wilkinson's Mycobacterial Immunology Group and the work of Associate Professor Graeme Meintjes' many excellent studies.

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The division is home to the only GeoSentinel Travel Surveillance Network Site in Africa, a collaborative research project between the Centres for Disease Control in Atlanta and the International Society of Travel Medicine, and recent international publications have highlighted the high-profile research of this area.

All administration involving the division at Groote Schuur Hospital is undertaken by Professor Mendelson, who is also President of the Federation of Infectious Diseases Societies of Southern Africa. He also administers the GeoSentinel Network Site.

Despite the burden of duties, he remains excited by many aspects of his work. "Particularly rewarding is policy development for national government in infectious diseases, around strategic planning for non-HIV and non-TB infectious diseases and antimicrobial resistance." Other highlights include developing infectious diseases control at a national and regional level through his work with the Federation of Infectious Diseases Societies of Southern Africa (FIDSSA) and the national Department of Health, interacting with international colleagues through the GeoSentinel Travel Surveillance Network and working with bright, committed and enthusiastic infectious diseases subspecialist trainees and consultant colleagues.

One of the shining lights of the division is the Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation, one of the first





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Professor Marc Mendelson conducting a ward round with a visitor (next to him), doctors Natalie Beylis (microbiologist), Sean Wasserman (senior registrar, fourth from left), Patryk Szymanski (medical registrar, fifth from left), Prudence Ive (senior registrar, sixth from left) and Sipho Dlamini (consultant, seated, facing).

public clinics to offer antiretroviral therapy to those living with HIV. Its activities include HIV prevention, treatment and training, as well as TB screening and management among some of the most vulnerable communities of the Western Cape. It operates symbiotically with the university's local field sites in the Nyanga and Masiphumelele areas of Cape Town.

Professor Mendelson says changing attitudes of healthcare professionals towards the subspecialty of infectious diseases (ID) and more recently surrounding the need for rational antimicrobial stewardship and proper infection prevention control is a big challenge.

The other significant challenge is the slow pace of change to engender staffing norms that are appropriate for the burden of disease that infections cause in South Africa. This hampers the opportunities for training and placement of trained ID physicians in secondary level and strategic district level hospitals throughout South Africa.

Outreach to clinics has also become an important aspect of the division's work. It contributes to clinical service at two sites in Khayelitsha, with specialists

performing consultations, attending ward rounds and helping specifically with HIV-TB assessments.

"Considering that 80 to 90% of young adults in Khayelitsha are infected by TB, there is definitely a need for TB preventive therapy which, when added to antiretroviral therapy, reduces the risk of TB by 37%," says Professor Mendelson.

"Training seven ID subspecialists in six years and growing the unit from scratch to a functioning service, leading the development of infectious diseases in South Africa through FIDSSA and work with the national DoH has definitely been a highlight," he says.

Looking ahead, he hopes to work on furthering the development of the ID service at Groote Schuur and UCT-affiliated hospitals through the rapid access ID service and the HIV rapid assessment unit. He also wants to expand antibiotic stewardship practice nationally and boost the training of more ID subspecialists so that high quality ID service is readily available throughout the country, rather than focused in the Western Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, and expansion of research and teaching activities of the ID clinical unit.