

ENDOCRINOLOGY AND DIABETES MEDICINE

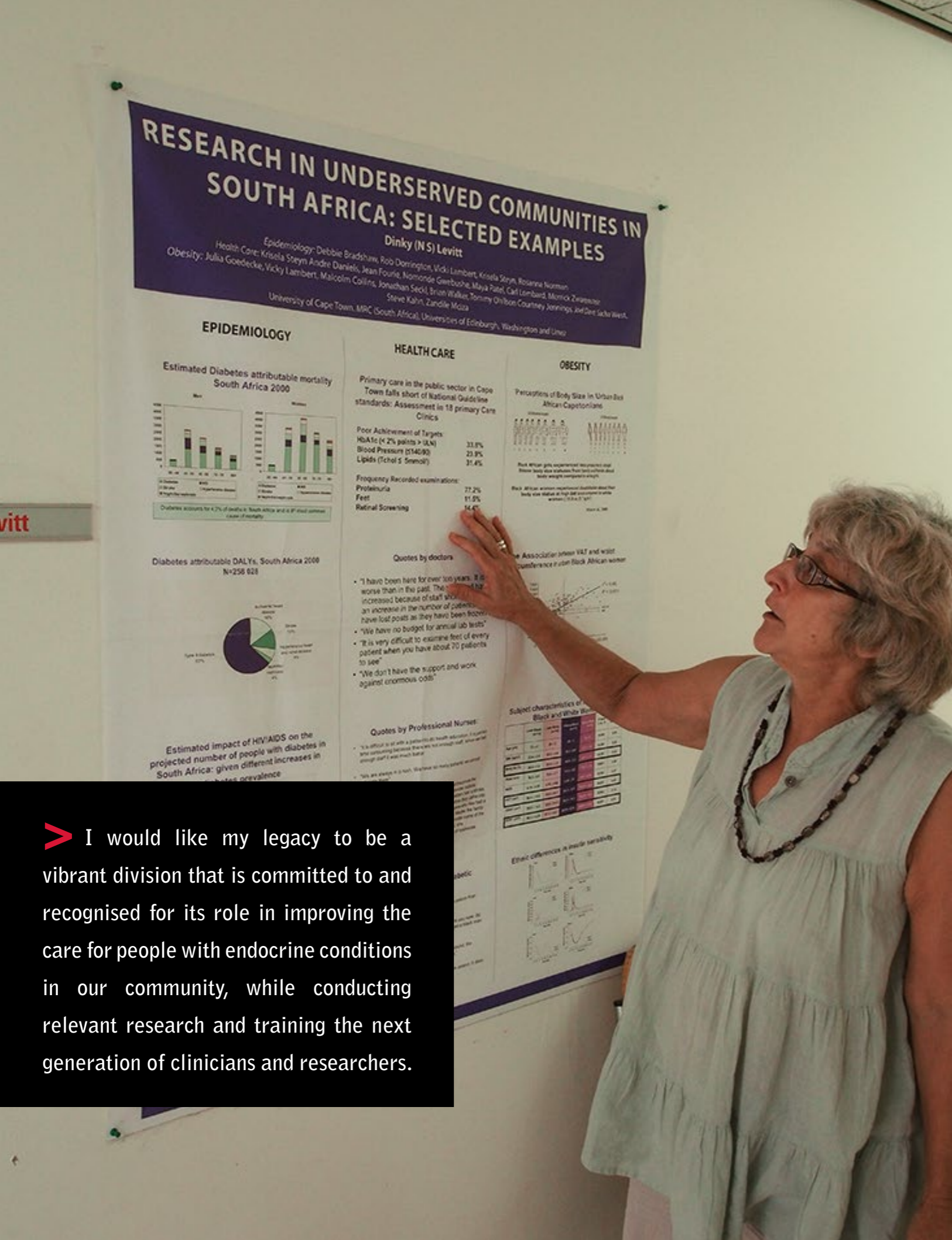
A vibrant division committed to caring for people with endocrine conditions



Professor
Naomi Levitt
Head of Endocrinology
and Diabetes
Medicine Division

The Division of Endocrinology is unique in South Africa in that it runs the only clinic in South Africa offering comprehensive care to transgender patients. But the services of this small division extend well beyond this niche area to offer vital services to patients with a host of endocrinal disorders such as thyroid dysfunction and diabetes – as well as being recognised as the preferred centre for training for medical professionals in this area in Africa.

The division has undergone vast improvements over the past 10 years. “We have set out to make life easier for patients by introducing new measures,



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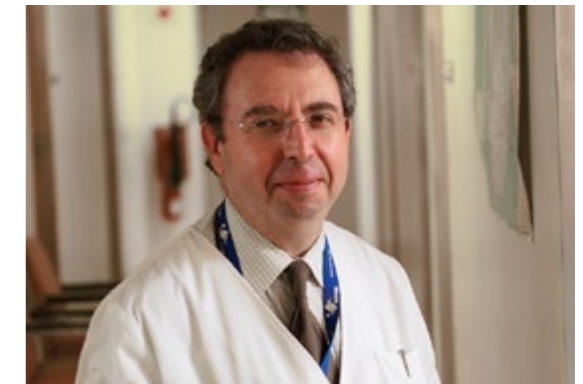
like changing clinic times to ensure that patients can do biochemical tests or have blood drawn, visit the clinic and receive medication on the same day,” says head of division, Professor Naomi Levitt.

New multidisciplinary clinics have also been established. “There is, for instance, the thyroid cancer unit. It is the only unit in the Western Cape and receives referrals from the public and private sectors,” says Professor Levitt. Other clinics have been initiated for neuroendocrine, as well as radiation oncology, endocrine surgery, nuclear medicine and endocrine involvement. The transgender clinic seeks to attend to the clinical needs of patients wishing to undergo gender reassignment and is currently the only clinic in South Africa that offers comprehensive care to these patients – with psychiatry, plastic surgery and other endocrinology and psychology services available for patients.

Professor Levitt has served as president of Diabetes South Africa, established an Addison’s disease support group and has helped bring about a Klinefelter support group. She has served on national regional and international guideline committees and has contributed to the prescribed minimum benefit guideline for endocrinology, used by medical aid organisations as a standard of care.

The division also focuses on academic training by introducing endocrine case-based tutorials for the fourth year medical students and there is a sizeable portion of PhD students in the division. UCT is viewed as a preferred centre for training for candidates from the rest of Africa.

The research portfolio and output have expanded substantially – the division collaborates with many researchers internationally and nationally. “The birth of the Chronic Disease Initiative for Africa (CDIA), a research collaboration between several institutions in the Western Cape and beyond that is seeking to



Doctor Ian Ross, consultant physician and endocrinologist.

develop and evaluate models for chronic disease care and prevention of their risk factor, has been particularly exciting,” notes Professor Levitt.

Specific niche areas of research are diabetes epidemiology, Addison’s disease, thyroid dysfunction, metabolic complications of HIV and AIDS, interaction between chronic infectious and non-communicable diseases (NCD) and developing and testing primary models models of care for people with NCD.

“It is difficult to select the most exciting thing that I do, as there are exciting aspects to all of the diverse elements of my work. But the least exciting is definitely administration,” jokes Professor Levitt.

She says from a training point of view, the teaching of budding endocrinologists and researchers – seeing them develop and grow into confident practitioners within their area of engagement is a definite highlight.

Professor Levitt says that the most challenging thing that she does is juggling the diversity of the work and attempting to meet all challenges.

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