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UCT researcher scoops Shoprite Checkers Woman of the Year Award

The University of Cape Town's Dr Elmi Muller scooped the Health Care-Givers category at this year's Shoprite Checkers Women of the Year Awards, which were announced recently (Saturday, 23 July 2011) in Johannesburg.

Dr Muller, based at UCT's Department of Surgery and at Groote Schuur Hospital, is a pioneer in the medical field as the first surgeon in the world to transplant a kidney from an HIV-positive donor to an HIV-positive recipient. She and her team carried out this historic transplant in October 2008 and they have since performed nine similar procedures.

Upon receiving the award, Dr Muller said: "I hope winning this award will help to stimulate public consciousness about transplantation in general. I believe it will also make a concrete difference in the lives of the patients to whom I am able to offer treatment for terminal conditions. It also gives me the opportunity to engage with the public on the issues of transplantation and HIV, which are of great concern for public health in South Africa. Both these issues are still highly stigmatised in our country."

Through her work, Dr Muller's hope is that the public understand that HIV is not a death sentence anymore and that these patients are not different to many others facing chronic diseases.

Regarding the issue of organ donation Dr Muller says: "To become an organ donor when you are brain-dead is a very difficult decision and often a decision that a family has to make without ever discussing beforehand with the deceased person. I hope that this award will bring organ donation to the forefront and on everybody's lips, so that people talk about organ donation and think about it before one of their loved ones die and they have to make this decision."

The Shoprite Checkers Women of the Year Awards recognise exceptional and visionary women achievers who with determination and foresight are making an impact on the future of fellow South Africans.

Dr Muller is currently organising the World Transplant Day scheduled for 24 September at the V & A Waterfront in Cape Town. The day will include a film and photo competition. Members of the public are encouraged to send in their photos to and come on that morning to see some of the films made around the theme "Saving a life". Entry forms and more information is available on www.worldtransplantday.info.

ENDS

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