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## **HIV: Surviving under immense pressure**

**Inaugural lecture by Professor Carolyn Williamson of the Department of Clinical Laboratory Sciences and the Institute of Infectious Diseases & Molecular Medicine: Wednesday, 23 May 2012, 17h30, Student Learning Centre Lecture Theatre, Anatomy Building, Faculty of Health Sciences, UCT**

University of Cape Town Professor Carolyn Williamson will deliver her inaugural lecture about her research into HIV, titled "HIV: Surviving under immense pressure", on 23 May 2012 at 17h30 in the Student Learning Centre Lecture Theatre, Anatomy Building at UCT's Faculty of Health Sciences in Mowbray.

Professor Williamson is the co-developer of the first candidate HIV vaccines to be developed in Africa and tested in clinical trials in both Africa and the USA. In 2001 she was co-winner of the World Technology Award for Health and Medicine in London. Through her research, she hopes to contribute to the development of microbicides and vaccines that can effectively prevent HIV infections.

During the two decades that Professor Williamson has spent in HIV research, she has witnessed the growth of the epidemic to unprecedented levels. Her early research was undertaken in the context of a country wrestling with large societal changes, the socio-economic challenges of the epidemic, and the extremely destructive era of HIV denialism (she was a member of the President Thabo Mbeki's HIV Advisory Panel). Her initial research on HIV-1 diversity tracked the epidemic in South African in the early 1990s. This work demonstrated that the country had two independent HIV epidemics: the data showed that the virus was introduced into the country via two routes, one from southern Africa into heterosexual communities, and the other from the US and/or Europe into homosexual communities. Her later work has focused on understanding how the virus survives the extreme immune pressure within the host, and elucidating why some people are able to control the virus, while others progress rapidly to disease.

### **Background**

Professor Williamson received her PhD in Microbiology in 1988 from UCT, where she conducted research into the possibility of using viruses as biological control agents for use within the agricultural sector. After a brief period at the National Institute for Virology Johannesburg, and a year in Newfoundland Canada, she returned to South Africa in 1990 as a post-doctoral scientist /lecturer at UCT. She was recruited in 1992 by the South African Institute for Medical Research, where she was given a specific brief to work on HIV. She was employed by UCT in 2002, and was appointed Head of

Division of Medical Virology in 2010 as a joint appointment with the National Health Laboratory Service.

Professor Williamson is a senior figure within the HIV research community and participates in numerous national and international consortia, including the Centre for AIDS Programme for Research in South Africa (CAPRISA), the Centre for HIV AIDS Vaccine Immunology, the Collaborative Programme for Vaccine Discovery, the HIV Vaccine Trials Network and the South African AIDS Vaccine Initiative. She has played an active role in the World Health Organisation and UNAIDS. She is an executive member of CAPRISA, was a member of the scientific advisory committee of the New York-based International AIDS Vaccine Initiative, and currently serves as a member of the scientific advisory committee for the UK HIV/AIDS Vaccine Consortium.

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***Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department***

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