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## UCT part of consortium to tackle blindness across the globe

The University of Cape Town's Division of Ophthalmology has been chosen as one of 11 expert institutions that form the Commonwealth Eye Health Consortium, making it a partner in the worldwide fight against blindness.

The consortium aims to build capacity to tackle avoidable blindness through strengthening health systems in Commonwealth countries, and to provide high-quality eye care to those affected or at risk.

Worldwide there are 285 million visually impaired people, of whom 39 million are blind. Yet 80% of blindness and visual impairment is curable or treatable, explains Professor Colin Cook, head of UCT's Division of Ophthalmology. "We are pleased to participate in this initiative that will provide scholarships for clinical fellows and masters students in public health (community eye health) from African Commonwealth countries who will study at UCT," says Professor Cook.

The consortium was established thanks to a £7.1 million (R131 million) grant from The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust and comprises a group of regional eye-health organisations, and training and academic institutions from several Commonwealth countries. It brings together a range of complementary skills as well as the capacity to deliver an integrated five-year programme of fellowships, research and technology in three priority eye diseases: trachoma; diabetic retinopathy; and retinopathy of prematurity. All consortium activities will be coordinated by the International Centre for Eye Health at the London School of Tropical Medicine.

"We are very grateful to The Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust for its support towards eye care and the elimination of avoidable blindness in the Commonwealth," says Professor Cook.

According to the Commonwealth Eye Health Consortium, the programme delivered by UCT's Division of Ophthalmology and the Consortium will support:

- **People:** strengthening capacity to deliver eye care, through training and information

- sharing;
- **Knowledge:** deepening understanding of avoidable blindness and approaches to tackling it, through research fellowships;
  - **Tools:** development and roll-out of technology such as the Portable Eye Examination Kit (Peek) system which will help identify and diagnose eye problems in any setting using only a smartphone; and OpenEyes, an electronic patient record system to replace inefficient and unreliable paper systems. These have the potential to bring about a revolution in affordable eye care.

For more information visit [cehc.lshtm.ac.uk](http://cehc.lshtm.ac.uk).

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