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UCT's H3D receives funding for research into optimising medicines in African populations

The University of Cape Town's (UCT) Holistic Drug Discovery and Development Centre, H3D, has received a donation of USD1.5 million from UCT alumnus and former chairman and CEO of Coca-Cola, Neville Isdell, to continue the work of the Neville Isdell Chair in African-centric Drug Discovery and Development established four years back at the institution.

Isdell donated about USD1.2 million towards research into the discovery of new medicines for infectious diseases and the establishment of the Neville Isdell Chair in African-centric Drug Discovery and Development at H3D in 2019.

Professor Kelly Chibale, H3D's director and founder who also holds the Chair, said: "The benefits of this new funding will include continuing with the development of models and tools towards optimising the use of available and future medicines in African populations, which is vital for improving treatment outcomes.

"Frontloading African-centric drug discovery into existing preclinical discovery tools is key to addressing inherent variability in responses to treatment amongst African populations and selecting optimised preclinical drug candidates that could be more suitable for clinical trials by Africans in Africa for Africans," he said.

The previous funding was instrumental in establishing the H3D African Drug Metabolism and Disposition Project, also known as the H3D 'African Liver Project'. This project is focussed on addressing the issue of variability in drug response across African populations, which is mostly driven by genetic differences in the expression and activity of drug metabolising enzymes.

Isdell, who is currently board member and President of the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF), said: "Professor Kelly Chibale has created and led a breakthrough in research into optimised medicines used in Africa which have not historically been served with an African perspective. His work will save lives and improve health with his determination, academic rigor, and quite strong leadership."

Sidney van Heerden, Director for Strategic Initiatives at UCT's Development and Alumni Department, who facilitated the donation with Professor Chibale, said: "With this continued

financial support the continuation of H3D's work will serve as a further demonstration of an area in which UCT provides global leadership."

Isdell was born in Ireland and raised in Zambia, Chibale's country of origin. He pursued a Bachelor of Social Science degree at UCT before joining Coca-Cola in Zambia in 1966. He worked for the company in 11 countries across the globe before rising to become Chairman and CEO. He has served on the boards of big corporates, including General Motors, as well as non-profits such as the WWF USA and the Peace Parks Foundation.

In 2019 he was named as the President of the 137-year-old UCT Rugby Football Club. A talented rugby player in his youth, Isdell has made several donations to club including a significant donation of USD1 million in 2011, which was used to fund the UCT Neville Isdell Rugby Centre. This is in addition to his funding of the Upper Campus Residence and its Neville Isdell Leadership camp.

Ends

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