



Communication and Marketing Department
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso
Kommunikasie en Bemerkingsdepartement

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
Welgelegen House, Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank, Cape Town
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 5427/5428/5674 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 5628

www.uct.ac.za

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UCT leading the way in women's health innovation: GIFT device offers early detection of STIs

The University of Cape Town (UCT), in collaboration with global and local partners, is at the forefront of a revolutionary development in women's health, which is aimed at assessing the effectiveness of the Genital Inflammation Test (GIFT) – an innovative and user-friendly device aimed at detecting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and bacterial vaginosis (BV) in asymptomatic women.

This groundbreaking initiative, led by a team of female scientists from UCT and supported by partners from South Africa, Australia, and other international institutions, has the potential to transform routine healthcare for women in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

This pioneering device offers new hope for early detection and treatment of STIs and BV, two conditions that remain significant health concerns for women across the globe. The GIFT device, which functions similarly to an over-the-counter pregnancy test, provides a fast and accessible way to screen for inflammation markers, allowing women to receive results during a single clinic visit. This eliminates the long waiting times that often hinder timely diagnosis and treatment in resource-limited settings.

[Dr Lindi Masson](#), a leading researcher at UCT's [Institute of Infectious Diseases and Molecular Medicine](#) and the Burnet Institute in Australia, highlighted the urgent need for such innovations. "Most women with an STI or BV don't have symptoms, so they don't seek healthcare. Although highly accurate diagnostic tests exist, they are often too expensive for widespread use in resource-limited settings. GIFT has the potential to change that," she said.

A three-country clinical study, spanning South Africa, Zimbabwe and Madagascar, and involving nearly 700 women, aims to compare GIFT's results with standard laboratory tests, assessing both sensitivity and specificity. The goal is to establish GIFT as a practical tool for routine use in family planning clinics and other healthcare settings in LMICs, empowering women to take control of their reproductive health.

The first results from this clinical study are expected by December 2024. Upon successful validation, the team will move forward with the registration of the device with the South

African Health Products Regulatory Authority, with funding from the Technology Innovation Agency and the South African Medical Research Council.

This homegrown innovation highlights UCT's leadership in women's health research and stands as a beacon of hope for women in underserved communities, offering the promise of better health outcomes and greater healthcare access.

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Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

Velisile Bukula

Head: Media Liaison
Communication and Marketing Department
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch
Tel: 021 650 2149
Cell: 071 642 3495
Email: velisile.bukula@uct.ac.za
Website: www.uct.ac.za