



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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Global mpox authority Professor Nachega to deliver keynote address at UCT conference

24-27 September 2024 | 08:00 | Cape Town International Convention Centre

Clinician-scientist and University of Cape Town (UCT) alumnus, Professor Jean Nachega, will deliver a highly anticipated keynote address at the World Congress of Epidemiology (WCE2024) to be hosted at the Cape Town International Convention Centre on Tuesday, 24 September 2024.

Nachega will address 1 500 delegates at the UCT-hosted WCE2024. His speech is titled "Critical Reflections on Epidemiology in Africa: Past, Present, Future".

Outlining key thoughts, Nachega says: "Africa's epidemiological landscape has undergone a fascinating evolution. Where once the focus was largely on communicable diseases, we've seen a shift toward the growing burden of non-communicable diseases. More recently, emerging and re-emerging pathogens with pandemic potential, such as Ebola, SARS-CoV-2, and mpox, have taken center stage. My keynote will explore this evolution, offering critical reflections on past lessons and outlining a forward-looking vision for research, training, and knowledge translation on the continent."

The four-day WCE2024 will take place from 24-27 September. This will be the 23rd iteration of the International Epidemiological Association's three-yearly public health meeting – and the first time it is hosted in Africa.

"It's a momentous occasion!" says Nachega. "Hosting WCE2024 in Africa for the first time is not only historic but a powerful opportunity to highlight Africa's pivotal contributions to global epidemiology."

Nachega chairs the steering committee of the Mpox Research Consortium (MpoxRec), an African-led research network founded in December 2023. He comments that "MpoxReC represents a critical step forward in Africa's response to mpox, with the goal of eliminating mpox as a public health threat." He adds that initially their efforts will focus on severely affected countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Cameroon, Ghana and Nigeria.

Born in the DRC, Nachege completed a PhD at UCT in 2008. Mentored by UCT's Professor Gary Maartens, his thesis explored antiretroviral therapy adherence and effectiveness in Southern Africa. At present, Nachege holds tenure at the University of Pittsburgh in the United States.

Professor Landon Myer, WCE2024 chair and head of UCT's Division of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, describes Nachege as "truly outstanding".

Myer adds: "Professor Nachege has been a leader in HIV research and his emerging insights into the mpox epidemic in central and west Africa have helped to focus global attention. He has always maintained close ties to his alma mater; he has continued to collaborate with us in research around HIV, chronic diseases, and most recently, mpox. In particular he has helped to engage and create opportunities for junior researchers at UCT in these areas."

The WCE2024 will highlight pioneering research from 108 countries, including 39 from Africa. Critical global health issues on the agenda include the impact of climate change on infectious diseases, pandemic preparedness, digital epidemiology and ethics around big data, and pharmacoepidemiology, the study of drug development and safety.

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Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

Thami Nkwanyane

Media Liaison and Monitoring Officer
Communication and Marketing Department
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch
Tel: (021) 650 5672
Cell: (072) 563 9500
Email: thami.nkwanyane@uct.ac.za
Website: www.uct.ac.za