

## **AWARDS/HONOURS**

### ***International recognition for CBTBR scientist***

Outstanding research on multi-drug resistant tuberculosis (MDR TB), as well as extremely drug-resistant tuberculosis (XDR TB) – a disease that has claimed the lives of a large number of South Africans in recent years – has earned Prof Tommie Victor of the Faculty of Health Sciences special recognition from the International Society for Infectious Diseases.

Prof Victor was invited to deliver a paper at the Society's international conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia recently. During the conference, he was awarded the Society's Sanofi Pasteur award, specifically for his outstanding research on multi-drug resistant tuberculosis, as well as extremely drug resistant tuberculosis. He received the SU Rector's award for research excellence in 2005.

Prof Victor is one of the senior research scientists in the Molecular Biology and Human Genetics division of the SU Department of Biomedical Sciences on the Tygerberg Campus who has played a pivotal role in establishing Stellenbosch University as one of the foremost institutions worldwide in the field of tuberculosis research. As a result of the work done by the Department, it has also been recognised by the South African government as a 'TB Centre of Excellence.'

Prof Victor has been working on the problem of drug resistance for nearly 20 years and has consistently highlighted the dangers inherent in this form of tuberculosis. He and Prof Paul van Helden initiated molecular research in TB in the middle of the 1980s and in the early 1990s a few researchers were working on TB in the Department. However, as this epidemic highly contagious, airborne respiratory disease was sweeping across the country, the research spotlight in the Department focused increasingly on this field of study.

Today, a team of almost 70 researchers, students, postdoctoral fellows, contract workers and technologists are studying various aspects of the epidemic. Prof Victor played a prominent role in establishing a highly integrated, inter- and multi-disciplinary team with local and international collaborators that boasts more than 200 research papers in highly rated international journals, a number of patents and one of the largest molecular epidemiology databases in the southern hemisphere that represents the drug susceptible and drug resistant epidemic of tuberculosis.

The researchers are working in partnership with the South African government, local institutions such as the National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS), international scientists and large consortia, supported by granting bodies such as the European Union, National Institutes of Health (NIH), Wellcome Trust and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

In addition to basic laboratory research, Prof Victor and his team endeavour to translate their findings into practical applications that will benefit patients, communities and the country's TB control programme. "A good relationship with the local TB control programme and local communities is, in fact, key in all our studies," he says.

Prof Victor says that their research Centre enjoys international recognition, at least in part due to their large collection of TB strains. Their access to an excellent P3 high-safety laboratory, have made it easier to access international research funding. "It also creates opportunities for our students to conduct collaborative research studies in laboratories of prestigious universities such as Harvard."

*Prof Tommie Victor is congratulated after receiving the Sanofi Pasteur award*

