

University offers new multidisciplinary course for airborne infection control

Airborne infection control is a global concern, more so in countries such as South Africa with high rates of tuberculosis. In addition to this, the lack of specialised training for health care-related topics in the built environment curricula results in low awareness levels and poor technical competence in addressing various issues, such as airborne infection risks.



→ A visit to the Modimolle multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis hospital in Limpopo.

To address this deficiency, the University of Pretoria and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Continuing Education at University of Pretoria (CE at UP), have successfully launched a multidisciplinary continuing education programme in building design and engineering approaches to airborne infection control.

The course is based on a prestigious Harvard School of Public Health course of the same name. It brings together a body of local and international technical expertise common to the control of human airborne infections, such as tuberculosis (including drug-resistant strains), the H1N1 virus, pandemic influenza and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), with particular reference to resource-constrained settings.

The introduction of this new course establishes an awareness of the role of the built environment in infection prevention and control, as well as a network of committed and interested professionals, together with ample evidence-based practical technical skills to take home good practices for better, safer public buildings in South Africa.

The course, which was presented at the University of Pretoria from 18 to 23 June 2012, was funded by the CDC. It was offered free of charge to 50

professionals, which included architects, engineering practitioners and health professionals actively involved in the design, engineering or operation of public buildings. These professionals are in a position to apply the information that was provided for the benefit of their respective institutions in terms of safer health facilities, public buildings or other congregate settings.

This course addressed control strategies, such as ventilation (natural and forced), the design and use of space, ultraviolet germicidal irradiation (UVGI), filtration and personal protective equipment. The strategies covered were applicable to preventing the transmission of infection in workplaces (including clinics, hospitals and laboratories) and congregate living settings.

Twenty-seven experienced lecturers from the Harvard School of Public Health, CDC, the University of Pretoria, the CSIR, the National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH), and other domestic and international sources presented papers during the six-day programme. Participants also had the opportunity to engage with the panel of experts regarding a design or engineering solution for airborne infection control.

The course is set to become an annual event, with the next one being planned for 24 to 29 June 2013 at the University of Pretoria. ➔