



Head of the Department of Psychiatry at UKZN, Professor Bonginkosi Chiliza.

PHOTO: UKZN

UKZN secures grant for joint study into mental health

SCIENTISTS from UKZN's College of Health Sciences have received a R12,8 million grant from the South African Medical Research Council and the UK Medical Research Council/Newton Fund for a UK-South Africa joint initiative on mental health.

The award will fund the implementation of a three-year multidisciplinary global health research study on first-episode psychosis in Msunduzi Municipality.

Psychotic disorders are common conditions (with a lifetime prevalence of four per 1 000 people) that contribute significantly to the global burden of disease and are associated with high morbidity, disability, health costs and lost economic productivity.

Deputy Vice-Chancellor and head of the College of Health Sciences, Professor Busisiwe Ncama, congratulated professors Bonginkosi Chiliza (head of the Department of Psychiatry at UKZN) and Jonathan Burns (professor of psychiatry at the University of Exeter), and the whole team for securing the grant.

"Mental health has been identified as one of our research focus areas. We are therefore very excited about the news of this grant, but most of all, we are looking forward to the impact that this research will have on the lives of people, especially mental health services."

The study, titled "PSYchosis MAPping in KwaZulu-Natal (PSYMAP-ZN)", aims to generate evidence that

will improve understanding of psychosis within a sub-Saharan African setting. It addresses the incidence rate, clinical presentation, and associated risk factors of psychosis as well as the impact of the social, economic and physical environment on incidence rates, onset and presentation of psychosis in this setting. It will also assess the help-seeking behaviours and pathways to care of people with psychosis and their families or caregivers.

The study will take place with participants from Msunduzi Municipality, which includes urban (Pietermaritzburg), peri-urban (Edendale) and rural (Vulindlela) regions. This will allow the scientists to conduct comparisons across economically, socially and cul-

turally diverse areas, all undergoing rapid economic and social transformation, e.g. growing urbanicity. Further, these analyses can be compared with data from UK and European studies.

Professor Chiliza and Professor Burns are the South African and UK principal investigators, respectively. Other members include Dr Andrew Tomita from UKZN and the KwaZulu-Natal Research Innovation and Sequencing Platform (co-investigator), Professor Frank Tanser (consultant), and doctors Saeeda Paruk and Shamima Saloojee (psychiatry).

The grant will be managed by the KwaZulu-Natal Research Innovation and Sequencing Platform (KRISP).

— Witness Reporter.