

SOCRU News

Meet the SOCRU Research Team

THE SOWETO Cardiovascular Research Heart Unit (Socru) was set up in 2006 to co-ordinate research into cardiovascular disease in Soweto, South Africa, and to promote research collaboration in this area. Socru is a research unit of the University of the Witwatersrand and Professor Karen Sliwa is the director.

The unit is based at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto, south of Johannesburg. It works hand-in-hand with the Cardiac Department at the hospital, researching heart disease in patients that visit the hospital's Cardiac Clinic. The clinic sees approximately 9000 patients per year.

Socru is funded primarily by the University of the Witwatersrand and receives projects grants from the South African Medical Re-



THE SOCRU TEAM: (Left to Right) Bridget Phooko, Patience Gumede, Nokululeko Ngwenya, Louis Kunika, Elizabeth Tshele, Rainy Masindi, Anthony Becker, Karen Sliwa, Grafford Relematha, Kemi Tibazarwa, Richard Ndlovu and Tanja Steenekamp from Bayer Healthcare, and Bridget Pretorius.

search Council, the Circulatory Disorder Research Fund, and also from business, including pharmaceutical companies Bayer, which sponsors our website, Pfizer,

and pacemaker manufacturer Medtronic. Tiger Brands is currently sponsoring a R1-million upgrade of the cardiac clinic, under its Unite for Health Programme.

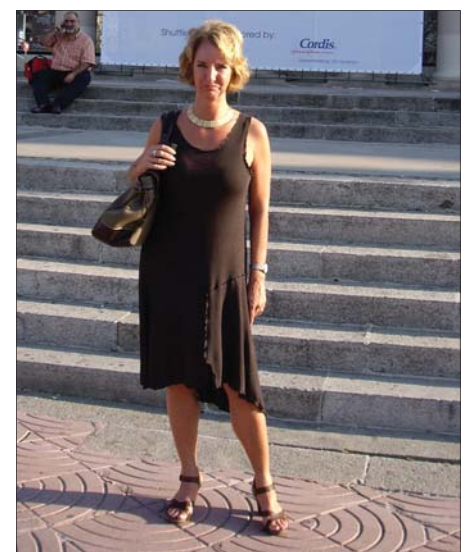
SOCRU Presents at World Cardiology Congress

SOCRU Director Professor Karen Sliwa and researcher Dr Olaf Forster presented four posters and a talk at the World Congress of Cardiology in Barcelona in September.

Forster presented on his research involving the interaction between HIV-induced immunodeficiency and peripartum cardiomyopathy.

Forster won a scholarship grant for his poster presentation entitled, "Treatment of Peripartum Cardiomyopathy of HIV-Infected Patients in a Low Resource Setting."

Sliwa gave an oral presentation on cardiomyopathy in Africa, examining how common forms of heart disease are affecting various regions in Africa.



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Peripartum Cardiomyopathy

RESEARCH TEAM: Dr Olaf Forster (PhD candidate on peripartum cardiomyopathy), Prof Karen Sliwa, Prof Aftab Ansari, Emory University, Atlanta, USA, Dr Denise Hilfiker-Kleiner, Hannover University, Germany, Dr Gerd Wallukat, Berlin, Germany, Winnie Tshane, research assistant, Marietta Nel, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (isolation of PBMC), Dr Geoff Candy, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

THE PERIPARTUM cardiomyopathy project is a collaborative project between the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa, Emory University, Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, Atlanta, USA, The University of Hannover, Molecular Cardiology, Germany and Max-Delbrück Centrum, Berlin, Germany.

Background

Peripartum cardiomyopathy (PPCM) has an incidence of 1:10,000 in the Western world, but

at our referral centre we see two to three new cases every week.

In Soweto, it seems the incidence of peripartum cardiomyopathy is 1: 1000 black South Africans, with a reported mortality of about 30%.

This unique situation promoted us to initiate a single centre prospective study of patients with PPCM, systematically assessing clinical status, the kinetics of cardiac function by echocardiography and collecting peripheral blood samples over a follow-up period of 36 months.



PROJECT LEADER: Dr Olaf Forster.

Heart of Soweto Study

THE Soweto Cardiovascular Research Unit officially launched the Heart of Soweto/Unite for Health Initiative at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto on September 8 2006.

Guests heard speeches from project leader Prof Karen Sliwa, researcher Prof Simon Stewart, and Adcock Ingram Managing Director Dr Jonathan Louw, who all spoke of the critical need for understanding and treating heart disease in Africa.

Sliwa also took visitors on a tour of the newly upgraded specialist heart failure clinic at the hospital and the screening site at the Bara taxi rank.

The Heart of Soweto Initiative was set up in response to a growing need for preventing and treating heart disease in bustling Soweto, a densely-populated urban area just south of Johannesburg, South Africa.



THE HEART OF SOWETO: Patients wait for screening at the Bara taxi rank.

SOCRU Launches Website



SOCRU recently launched its website, www.socru.org, at a dinner at Gold Reef City, kindly sponsored by Bayer Healthcare Pharma.

Sliwa Publishes in *The Lancet*

UNITED KINGDOM medical journal *The Lancet* (Vol. 368 No. 9536) recently published Prof Karen Sliwa's written seminar on the topic of peripartum cardiomyopathy (PPCM).

The seminar provides a concise overview on the current understanding of the epidemiology, aetiology, clinical profile, and management of PPCM. *The Lancet* is one of the oldest and most respected peer-reviewed medical journals in the world.