

28 February 2025

NEWS RELEASE

UP's Prof De Wet Swanepoel wins International Award for Hearing for improving access to hearing healthcare



Prof De Wet Swanepoel.

Pretoria - [Professor De Wet Swanepoel](#) of the [Department of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology](#) at the [University of Pretoria](#) (UP) has received the [International Award for Hearing](#) from the [American Academy of Audiology](#). Prof Swanepoel – who co-founded the [hearX Group](#), a digital health company – received the award for his research that seeks to expand mobile hearing care to underserved areas locally and globally. He also leads research for the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Collaborating Centre for the Prevention of Deafness and Hearing Loss at UP.

This award reinforces the importance of translational research, where published findings lead to tangible solutions.

Prof Swanepoel stated that “I’m truly honoured to receive this award. More than personal recognition, it highlights the importance of making hearing care accessible to those who need it most.”

As a globally recognised accolade, the [International Award for Hearing](#) could open doors to new opportunities for international collaborations and the possibility of influencing policy changes that will greatly improve hearing care for the public.

“Hearing loss is a silent epidemic”, Prof Swanepoel says. “We can’t wait for people to find care – we need to take care to them.”

Hearing connects us, he adds. “It is how we share stories, emotions and relationships. Making sure no one loses that connection is what drives my work”.

An integral part of Prof Swanepoel’s work revolves around telehealth and, more specifically, teleaudiology. Telehealth uses technology to deliver healthcare solutions remotely to underserved communities, while teleaudiology applies this principle to mobile hearing care. By digitising and mobilising hearing care, marginalised communities are able to gain access to basic healthcare. This is particularly important in regions like Africa, where only 2% of people who need hearing aids actually get them.

The main goal of Prof Swanepoel’s research is to tackle the shortcomings of traditional hearing healthcare by refining a borderless innovation that takes hearing care to anyone, anywhere. Ideally, this would involve bringing hearing care solutions to the estimated 700 million people who will need these services by 2050.

“We need to stop thinking of hearing care as something that only happens in a clinic,” Prof Swanepoel says. “It should happen wherever people need it, whether that’s a village, the workplace or their home.”

This has become increasingly achievable thanks to new developments in digital technologies and artificial intelligence, which now allow hearing aid tune-ups, hearing screenings and other hearing services to be conveniently accessed through a smartphone.

The global scaling of mobile hearing support services is being made possible through the partnership between the hearX Group, the WHO and UP. This partnership was forged with the development of the hearZA National Hearing Screening app by UP and hearX, the first app of its kind globally. It caught the attention of the WHO and was packaged to become the [hearWHO](#) app.

“What started as a South African innovation has now screened half a billion people worldwide for hearing loss,” Prof Swanepoel says.

His role in this partnership is at the intersection of research and innovation. His work includes ensuring that new technologies are scientifically validated and impactful on a local and global scale. Minimally trained healthcare workers can be remotely supervised by audiologists and can provide hearing solutions to local communities through these technologies.

Global and local mobile hearing solutions work towards ensuring that everyone who is in need of hearing care services will have access to them, regardless of their circumstances or location.

--- End ---

Media enquiries can be directed to Mr Sashlin Girraj - Public Relations & Events Manager

ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on its Hatfield Campus in Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also one of the largest producers of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the [Gordon Institute of Business Science](#) (GIBS). It is the only university in the country with a [Faculty of Veterinary Science](#), which is ranked the best in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes. It has the most academic staff with PhDs (70%), NRF-rated researchers (613).

The 2025 Times Higher Education subject rankings placed UP first in South Africa in the fields of [Accounting](#) and [Finance](#); [Architecture](#); [Electrical and Electronic Engineering](#); Law; Sport Science; and Veterinary Science. UP's Faculty of Law has been ranked as the top law school in Africa for a remarkable eighth consecutive year.

Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked the University among the top five in Africa, as part of their [2024 World University Rankings \(WUR\)](#). UP was the only South African university featured in the [2023 World University Rankings for Innovation \(WURI\)](#), falling within in the 101-200 range of innovative universities.

For more information, please go to www.up.ac.za