

# UCT trains health committee members

HAZEL ALLIES-HUSSELMAN

Health committee members from the Klipfontein Sub-district completed a three-week training course to help them do their work more efficiently at health facilities.

The training was initiated by the African Learning Network at the University of Cape Town (UCT). Health committee members from Hanover Park, Heidelberg, Manenberg, and Athlone, among those who attended, were among the first of eight sub-districts in the Western Cape to receive this training.

Anita Marshall, a trainer at UCT's health and human rights division, said national legislation states that every health facility (clinics and day hospitals) should have a health committee.

The main objectives of the training is to help members understand what their core functions are. According to the legislative network, they need to understand their own legitimacy. Some of the matters we dealt with include effective community participation, how to identify stakeholders, and the proper implementation of democratic practices.

Sometimes one finds that facilities are lacking compassion, for example, when a young pregnant woman comes to the clinic, or someone who is HIV-positive, or a sex worker comes to the clinic. At times, there is no confi-



■ Anita Marshall from the University of Cape Town's health and human rights division, trained health committee members from the Klipfontein Sub-district.

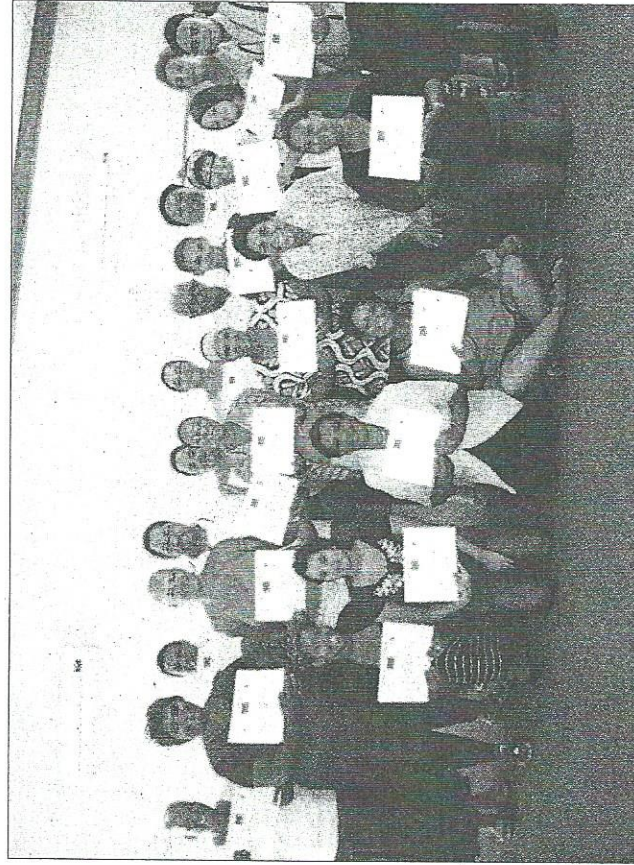
dentiality, as some staff members may call out your name in a crowd and ask if you are coming for your antiretroviral treatment.

"We also discussed the Bill of Rights, from a human rights perspective. And as we went along with the training, other areas were identified that are in need of training. Most of the concerns were around health issues – such as how to deal with teenage pregnancies, child abuse, cancer and working with the

elderly and chronic illnesses," Ms Marshall said.

Christine Jansen, who is the treasurer of the Manenberg Health Committee and secretary of the Klipfontein Sub-district Health Forum, said the training was beneficial.

"Sometimes members of health committees are made to believe that their role is to clean the clinic, but that is not our role. In terms of governance, we must ensure that



■ The health committee members all received certificates for completing the three-week training course.

patients get the best quality service. We need to look at the rights of the patient, which include getting healthcare with dignity.

"The training capacitated us as health committee members to build the structure, and importantly to get community involvement," she said.

Acting chairperson of the Heideveld Health Committee, Leslie Sylvester, said the training was a "great tool to uplift and strengthen

health committees".

"We would like to thank SA Learning Network and UCT for this training opportunity. We did not receive training from provincial government to help us understand our role better. We now know our rights, we have a network, whereas before, we didn't know who to complain to, and we also know how to partner with the community and other stakeholders to help our community," Mr Sylvester said.

PICTURES: HAZEL ALLIES-HUSSELMAN