

The Uganda Cambridge Cancer Initiative Newsletter

Issue 2 | January 2021



Welcome!

Welcome to the second edition of the Uganda Cambridge Cancer Initiative Newsletter! Our Initiative is a collaboration between the [Uganda Cancer Institute](#) (UCI) and several different groups in Cambridge including Cambridge-Africa at the University of Cambridge UK, Cancer Research UK Cambridge Institute (CRUK CI), Cancer Research UK Cambridge Centre (CRUK CC) and Cambridge Global Health Partnerships (CGHP). Read the [first newsletter here](#).



About us

[Cambridge-Africa](#) is a University of Cambridge programme that supports African researchers and promotes mutually beneficial collaborations. Cambridge-Africa leads the coordination of the Initiative with the UCI. The UCI is a cancer treatment, research and teaching centre located in Kampala, Uganda, which has 80 beds and sees approximately 200 patients every day. The link between the UCI and Cambridge began in 2018 and has since grown into a wider network comprising of a number of research projects, collaborations and student exchanges. Read more about us on our [webpages](#).

Follow us on social media!

Follow us [@CambridgeAfrica](#) and [@UgandaCancerIns](#). We use the hashtag [#UgandaCambridgeCancer](#) on Twitter.

Staff Profile: Dr Nixon Niyonzima, Uganda Cancer Institute (UCI)

Each newsletter features a member of staff or researcher who works within the Initiative. In this issue we focus on Dr Nixon Niyonzima, Head of Research at the Uganda Cancer Institute.



With a MBChB from Makerere University, a MSc Global Health from Duke University and a PhD in Cell and Molecular Biology from the University of Washington, Nixon is an experienced doctor and researcher and has worked at the UCI since 2011.

Dr Nixon Niyonzima and Dr Jackson Orem, Executive Director of UCI first met members of the University of Cambridge during a visit to the UCI in 2018, communicating the exciting developments taking place and the UCI vision to be an internationally recognised centre of excellence advancing comprehensive cancer management in Africa. In May 2019, the main research team from the UCI visited Cambridge, meeting researchers in several departments and developed opportunities for collaboration within the research and clinical oncology community. Dr Niyonzima currently works on several collaborative projects with researchers at the University of Cambridge. Further project details can be found on our [Initiative pages](#).

Work in Progress: A year spent at the Uganda Cancer Institute



Dr Marta Ferraresso is a Postdoctoral Researcher in the Department of Pathology at the University of Cambridge. Marta spent a year working at the UCI between 2019-2020, as part of the collaborative grant awarded to Dr Suzanne Turners' lab in Cambridge and Dr Jackson Orem at the UCI, looking at Burkitt Lymphoma. Marta says, "I arrived in Uganda on the 1st of February 2019 and my first shock was to see this never-ending expanse of green everywhere I looked. I quickly understood why Uganda is called 'the Pearl of Africa'! My first few weeks at the UCI were very hectic, trying to orientate myself in another country and in a completely different environment. Sylvester Kadhumbula, Medical Laboratory Scientist at the UCI (shown in the photo on the left

with Marta) and Dr Nixon Niyonzima (pictured above) showed me how they work and how to overcome difficulties, sometimes due to lack of resources. They always offered help with a smile."

As well as Marta's research work in the laboratories at UCI, she attended several meetings such as the Children's Cancer Board where different specialists and doctors joined to help in the decision process on the treatment of children with cancer. Marta was instrumental in setting up a project with a play-therapist in a private room to help the children and their families throughout their treatment. Books and toys were donated from a local school and private donations were given to guarantee a stipend for a teacher for one year. In July 2020, the group opened the molecular lab where Sylvester is directing the study and enrolling the patients and a play-therapist teacher has been selected to start working collaboratively on the children's ward. Since Marta returned to Cambridge in September she has been in regular contact with friends and colleagues at UCI where the research work is ongoing, having recently recruited the first seven patients for the project. Marta says, "I really hope that I will be able to return to Uganda in 2021, and I can't wait to work with everyone again!" Read Marta's [full blog article](#) about her experiences at UCI on the Cambridge-Africa website.

Project News

- A recent blog article titled '[The ongoing collaboration between the Uganda Cancer Institute \(UCI\) and Cambridge](#)' was published on the Cambridge-Africa website in November 2020 with recent project news and updates.
- Congratulations to Dr Nixon Niyonzima (UCI) and Dr Davina Gale (Cancer Research UK Cambridge Institute, University of Cambridge) on their recent awards from both the Cambridge-Africa ALBORADA Research Fund and the Pfizer Breast Cancer Competitive Research Grant Program for Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America Regions. The funding will enable Nixon, Davina and their teams to investigate the use of circulating tumour DNA (ctDNA) as a non-invasive liquid biopsy for the detection of tumour DNA in blood samples from patients with metastatic breast cancer treated at the UCI.
- Following a scoping visit to Kampala in early 2020, a team of CGHP volunteers have continued strengthening links with partners at the UCI, and have agreed to extend the research partnership to include a clinical partnership focused on improving paediatric cancer nursing through training and mentorship. Partners will be co-developing this exciting project over the coming months. Read more about the Chemotherapy Safety Improvement Project led by Dr Joyce Balagadde (UCI) and Dr Denise Williams (Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge) in [our first newsletter](#).
- Despite the ongoing limitations and delays caused by COVID-19, the teams in both Cambridge and Kampala continue to meet every six weeks via Zoom (pictured above).

Contact/Get involved!

If you would like to be involved in the Initiative please contact Polly Basak, Project Coordinator on the Uganda Cambridge Cancer Initiative, Cambridge-Africa team, University of Cambridge, UK. Email: pab92@cam.ac.uk