

## SOCIAL RESPONSIVENESS AWARD

The Social Responsiveness Award provides an institutional signal to members of the University that social responsiveness is an important institutional priority.

### **Dr Hanna Andrea Röther**

*Principal Research Officer, in the Centre for Occupational and Environmental Health Research*

Dr Röther's work on the consequences of the use of street pesticides for pest control in South Africa's peri-urban areas on children's health and health policy is not only pioneering a new area in the field of public health but is also influencing state and international policy. Through her research on household pesticide use she has not only brought to light the illegal use of agricultural pesticides (not intended for household consumption) to tackle poverty-related pest infestations, but she has also used her data to engage with key government and non governmental institutions about possible solutions to the use of illegal and highly toxic pesticides among the urban poor in Cape Town. In designing the research agenda she has developed innovative research methods. During all stages of the project she has fostered a participatory research approach. A community NGO co-initiated the project and participated in the research design. A Child Pesticide Policy reference group with representatives of the community, child health practitioners, from the three tiers of government was established prior to commencement and meets regularly to discuss findings, problems and intervention at every stage of the research. This innovative approach is evidence of shared planning and decision-making practice.

This work has produced a wide range and different kinds of scholarly outputs and risk communication tools to disseminate knowledge to a broad range of stakeholders – academics, government officials and community members. Locally, a point chart and algorithm was developed for identifying poisoning by 'street pesticides' for clinicians in health facilities. Various risk communication tools developed by the project are now being implemented in Cape Town's peri-urban centres (e.g., stickers on the hazards of street pesticides) and are under negotiation for national distribution through Pick n Pay stores (e.g., pamphlets providing pesticide-risk information to consumers). A pamphlet in three languages to raise awareness of pesticide hazards was adopted by local stakeholders for wider dissemination. Development of a wall chart on prevention of child pesticide poisoning was inserted into a local newspaper. Nationally, production of a Guideline for Preventing Child Pesticide Poisonings in SA has been distributed to all Environmental Health Professionals; a new notification form to improve the national notification system for pesticide poisoning has been implemented by the National Department of Health; and there have been presentations to a national conference organised by the Departments of Health and Environmental Affairs and Tourism and to local conferences.

Dr Röther is drawing on her work to develop a new research-led curriculum for a post-graduate diploma and MPhil in pesticide risk management. The students for this programme are predominately pesticide regulators from South Africa and other parts of Africa and the programme's focus is on equipping under-resourced officials to reduce risks from pesticide use, particularly for vulnerable populations.

The project provides a learning experience for undergraduate, honours and master's degree students in the Health Sciences Faculty and in Anthropology. Students conducted community-based household surveys, collected narratives from families/carers of poisoned children, conducted hospital record reviews, participated in field observations, interviewed informal sellers of pesticides and worked alongside community fieldworkers. The project has provided a base for students across disciplines to learn together, to present their findings to policy stakeholders and to participate in practitioner training.