



Prof. Peter Mbat

# One year in Office



# Vice Chancellor engages with Academic and Support Staff of the School of Medicine



The Vice Chancellor Prof Peter Mbat continues with his visits to Schools as part of his crusade to entrench the centrality of the academic project at SMU. His recent stop was at the School of Medicine (SOM) where he engaged with academic and support staff in the School, and also held a dialogue with Heads of Departments (HODs) and Chairpersons of the Academic Committees.

Prof Risenga Chauke the acting Dean of the School of Medicine gave an overview of the School's operations and outlined the School's strategic plan. During his presentation Prof Chauke raised the challenges posed by the COVID-19 regulations and its impact on the holistic training of medical students, given that online training creates the risk of students

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having limited clinical exposure, which is a basic tenet of medical training. He also added that SOM is developing a plan to increase the output of postgraduates and PhD's.

The Heads of Departments also got an opportunity to brief Prof Mbatu on their operations and also shed some light on some of the challenges they face in their work, calling upon the VC to intervene in certain specific cases. It was also noted that the SOM currently offers the Emergency Medical Care (EMC) programme which was introduced in 2016, but that there should be improvement on marketing the programme to attract more students. Prof Mbatu advised the School to consider marketing the programme within the SADC region and beyond as one of the strategies to strengthen and grow the EMC programme at SMU.

Another positive development from the School is that the Department of Radiography has recently been accredited to offer a Bachelor of Radiology Honors' programme. On the other hand, there is a challenge of lack of adequate resources to acquire cutting edge technology and this has in a way weakened its capacity to grow. There is a need to invest in imaging technology.

Further, the SOM has identified the development of short courses as an area to be explored for financial sustainability, and new programmes must be introduced to increase student numbers towards this aim. A revised MBChB 1 curriculum will be introduced in 2022, and this

will introduce opportunities for collaboration and integration in all the first and second year categories.

In response to issues that were raised, Prof Mbatu expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to engage with academic and support staff, and encouraged the academics to speak out and have their voices heard in the health education discourse, and in so doing contribute towards fostering culture change at SMU. He congratulated them for the good work they were doing in the core business of Teaching, Learning, Research and Community Engagement, and challenged them to seize the opportunity to tell their stories, using the University platforms available. Prof Mbatu also added that academics need to utilise their skills, the facilities and infrastructure to explore opportunities generated by the demands of the 4th Industrial Revolution and COVID-19 challenges, in order to bring about financial sustainability to the SMU academic enterprise.

The VC later went on a walk about at the Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital (DGMAH) where he visited the Ophthalmology Department and the Paediatric wards. He interacted with staff members in the wards to learn more about their experiences and inspected the facilities with the Acting Deputy Dean of the School of Medicine, Prof Dini Mawela. The VC visits engender much excitement and encourage employee engagement, which is much needed at the University.

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