

Newsflash!

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MEC Nkomo Ralehoko conducts a follow up visit to SMU to give feedback

Gauteng Health and Wellness MEC Nomantu Nkomo Ralehoko undertook a follow up visit to SMU today 05 May 2023. She was accompanied by a high powered delegation from both the Premier's office and the department.

In welcoming the MEC and her entourage to SMU, Vice-Chancellor Prof Peter Mbatlali said he appreciated and was encouraged by the visit to the University as this brought hope that government is serious about working with the University. "We are the only dedicated health sciences university in Southern Africa and this presents a huge opportunity for SMU. I must add that there is really a renewed strategic intent to be a leader in both health education and health services because we work very closely with our clinical platforms. We have an integral working relationships as we have said in the past with Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital, the National Health Laboratory Services, and have a dedicated dental teaching hospital", said Mbatlali.

Mbatlali used the occasion to revisit some of the matters raised with the MEC during her previous visit. These inclu-



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ded the matter of Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital being a fit for purpose tertiary academic teaching hospital; facilities for oral health services and their repurposing; staffing for both School of medicine and dental hospital; issues of the bulging student debt amongst others. He explained that SMU is home to a large proportion of students from indigent families who qualify and have a right to be here to pursue their studies but have difficulties to pay their tuition fees. “We plead with the MEC and Premier's offices for an increase of bursaries for students who come to SMU and also call for innovative ways to clear issues of students' debt”.

Mbati also announced that plans are underway to build a centre for pandemics at SMU. “This is a project that is being coordinated from the department of Science and Innovation and will be a collaborative effort between SMU and 6 other universities. I was in Canada for a South Africa/Canada universities forum and there is an intention to bring in partnerships from Canada to assist us in the setting up of the centre for pandemics”, he said.

Mbati informed the delegation that there is a move to reintroduce veterinary medicine and animal health science through the concept of one health. He explained that engagements are ongoing between the University

and both the Ministers of Higher Education and Training as well as Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development to move forward with this programme.

SMU member of Council Dr Mangaliso Mahlaba said the university's history speaks for itself and assured the MEC that in SMU, the department has a credible partner to work with. He emphasised that SMU is open for business and government should come on board and partner with the university. Mahlaba explained that the University has facilities and the necessary expertise that government can use.

Providing an update since her last visit, the MEC reported that her department is working on the issues that were raised during her previous visit. She emphasised that she is in the process of giving all hospitals a facelift because if things fall apart in hospitals, her department has to account. The MEC committed that by the time Premier Panyaza Lesufi visits SMU, they will be in a position to bring results. She further explained that the planned 400 bed hospital earmarked for Soshanguve should become a reality as it will ease the pressure currently faced by George Mukhari Academic Hospital. She further said the relationship between SMU and the department should be tightened so that it bears fruits.



In his response to some of the issues previously raised, the Acting HOD for the Gauteng Health Department Lesiba Malotana called for a project management approach to be applied to deal with the matters. Regarding the staffing issues at the Dental hospital, he said there are quick solutions being put in place so that the service can carry on but emphasised that a proper and detailed Business Case is required. The department approved that for the next three months, money will be found for fund the staffing that the hospital lost in March this year. Malotana further said, the leadership issues facing the School should be speedily resolved for purposes of stability and certainty.

Regarding the expansion of the clinical learning platform, the HOD said the parties needed to agree as part of the immediate projects on how to use the district service platforms to expand and increase access services.

To deal with issues of student debt and poverty, Malotana explained that there is a bigger provincial approach to debt poverty alleviation programmes and how they can assist. He called for a coordinated approach as there are other departments and government agencies including the private sector who may come to support a credible programme.

Malotana further said forensic pathology services presents an opportunity for new programmes which will help to

address scarcity of practitioners and generate income for the university through accredited short learning programmes. He said the University must assist government to solve a real world problem.

He revealed that the department is underspending on training because there are not training programmes and called for SMU to come forward so that money can be redirected for training. He gave the example of community health care workers and those working in the Expanded Public Works Programme as a cohort that SMU can help to professionalize.

The parties agreed that there is a need to anchor the partnership between the University and the Gauteng government through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and also setup a joint Committee representing all the parties.

In his closing remarks, Mbatlana emphasised that SMU is open for partnerships and collaborations with the Gauteng province such as in the areas of sports, training and infrastructure. He added that should the province identify suitable partnerships, that these could be directed to the University.