

Introducing Prof Nathaniel Mofolo Dean: School of Medicine



Focus on SMU reporter interviewed Prof Nathaniel Mofolo to get more insight into his plans for the School of Medicine. Prof Mofolo is well experienced in the area of health sciences, with strong strategic leadership and management skills. He holds a BSc, MBChB, MFamMed and DBA (HES). Before joining Sefako Makgatho Health Science University, he held the position of Adjunct Professor and Head: of the School of Clinical Medicine at the University of the Free State (UFS). He serves on many committees and is currently a member of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), chairperson of the Professional Practice Committee of the Medical and Dental Board.

Briefly, tell us about your academic and leadership journeys respectively.

I'm a family physician with more than 12 years of experience in higher education and I am currently in the last phase of my doctoral studies in higher education business administration studies (DBA) in higher education management with the University of Bath in the United Kingdom. I was Head of the School of Clinical Medicine at the University of the Free State with 26 clinical departments that comprise both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

Originally I'm from a small rural village of Tsheseng in the former homeland of QwaQwa, I started my junior degree in Bachelor of Science with the University of the North (QwaQwa branch) in 1993 and moved to Bloemfontein in 1995 to complete my degree with the University of the Free State (UFS) where I majored in Biochemistry and Human Physiology, in 1997 I was admitted to study medicine at the UFS, and completed my degree in 2001. I furthermore completed my training in Family Medicine in 2006 after completing my medical internship and community service in 2003. Since 2007, I have been involved in health care management and education as a manager and trainer.

As a former member of the UFS Executive Committee of Senate in 2019, I was nominated by Universities South Africa (USAF) to represent them at the Health Professionals Council of South Africa (HPCSA) at the council level; I was selected to be a member of the management and executive of the HPCSA. I am the Chair of the Practice Management Committee at the HPCSA and was involved in many roles in the Free State Department of Health and the National Health Department, Colleges of Medicine, and Academy of South African Family Practice and also sit on various committees.

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How best can you describe your leadership style?

I think my leadership style can be described as engaging, transformative and highly ethical and as the Head of the School of Medicine, I aim to improve knowledge and understanding of risks in which academic staff, students and patients operate, through consultations and engagement with government, professional bodies, communities and university leaders. I will also in turn communicate those risks and opportunities accurately and truthfully.

What is your vision for the School of Medicine?

I'd like to create a School of Medicine that produces competent healthcare workers who are committed to transforming healthcare services in communities through service excellence and innovation.

What are your short- and long term goals for the School of Medicine?

Our current short term plans include profiling and identifying departmental needs within the School of Medicine to be able to develop strategic plans on how to close current gaps within the school while strengthening governance structures and fostering collaborations. Long Term, I'd like to see and create a sustainable, stable and developing medical school that is making a mark on the African continent.

What is your strategy for increasing research throughout the School of Medicine?

I plan to strategically build capacity and support for SREC to have a reasonable turnaround time to be able to handle ethics approval timeously. We also need to identify research focus areas in the School to develop research hubs which will in turn assist us to identify and develop research chairs and champions in the school and have outputs in publications with international authors and possibly assist the school in publishing in higher impact factor journals.

What plans do you have to ensure that the School of Medicine is distinguished from other medical schools?

I plan to develop an interdisciplinary research collaboration approach with other schools and the community at large, e.g. our research should be more focused on finding solutions relevant to the African context.

What would you do to help improve the workplace culture?

The workplace culture can be improved by trying to facilitate accountability while also creating an environment where everyone feels valued and welcomed.

Which student-related initiatives are you likely to introduce?

I'd like to create a social space for dialogue and continuous engagements both for students and staff (student councils, Deans of students, staff and management) and increase student involvement in decision-making processes. I'm also passionate about strengthening support i.e. tutoring, mentoring, and counselling, financial aid (identifying vulnerable students).

What are your plans for fostering a good relationship between students and School Management?

As mentioned in my response to the previous question I would like to increase student involvement within the School of medicine but most importantly is the understanding of the needs of the generation "Z" medical and health sciences students.

What message would you like to share with our readers?

We are building a sustainable future and innovation that is going to transform the lives of South Africans, and the School of Medicine will be at the frontiers of teaching and learning innovation through the 4th and 5th industrial revolutions. We aspire to see our graduates becoming competitive and well sought after globally, for us to do this, we need students and the community at large to be positive active role players in ensuring this vision comes to reality.



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EMPLOYEE WELLNESS



Introducing SMU Employee Wellness and Organisational Development Practitioner

Mr Azwindini Christopher Mukhudwana is employed as **SMU Employee Wellness and Organisational Development Practitioner**. The main purpose of his role is to provide professional organisational development and employee wellness service to Schools and Departments to improve the effectiveness of the organisation and its members through long-range, planned, systematic and well-managed interventions in the university's human processes, structures and systems, in anticipation of, and response to changes in the environment at SMU. Focus on SMU caught up with Mr Mukhudwana to get more insight on his role and how it will benefit the SMU employees.

Kindly introduce yourself to our readers.

I am Azwindini Christopher Mukhudwana employed as Employee Wellness and Organisational Development Practitioner. A dedicated EWP and OD professional with 12 years of experience in government departments, local government and institutions of higher learning. Experienced in drafting documents such as policy, Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP). I also have experience in stakeholder engagement and management and programme development, implementation and management. One is also able to provide performance management training, counselling and managing psychosocial assessment, incident stress debriefing and referrals. Furthermore, I have knowledge in conducting training and workshops for staff members, union representatives and management, monitoring and evaluation of EW programmes and OD initiatives.

I believe in human capital development and management and facilitating a conducive environment for career mobility. I believe in the transformational leadership style in a way of giving people autonomy in doing their work. It is through this which make them feel accepted and valued within the organisation thereby improving morale and maximising individual and organisational performance. In possession of BCom Honours in Industrial and Organisational Psychology, Bachelor of Arts in Social Work, Diploma in Project management. I also count var-

ious certificates in my possession in the fields of wellness and OD, EAP, HIV and AIDS counselling, Mentoring and Coaching management, Certificate in performance management, employment equity and strategic workforce planning.

What is your job description as an Employee Wellness Practitioner (EWP)?

Part of my job is to develop, implement and manage employee wellness programmes. Conduct EWP, and OD policy and procedure audits. Policy development and the update of existing policies and procedures for EWP and OD. Ensure proper processes are followed for approval of policies and procedures. Provide continuous feedback to line management and staff on implementation practices related to policies and procedures. Monitor employee health and organisational health indicators, identify problem/ concern areas and communicate to relevant stakeholders.

Identify employee wellness trends and OD trends and issues in SMU and communicate to relevant stakeholders. Proactively identifying and implementing change management interventions to support structural/system/process changes. Advising managers and/or teams on appropriate strategies to resolve organizational health issues. Facilitating OD interventions. Assist in providing input to the development of the HR strategy. Assist in the development of strategic and operational action plans which support the University's strategic objectives. Provide input to the organisational transformation strategies within the Portfolio Areas.

How will your role as EWP benefit the SMU Employees?

Amongst other things, the role of EWP will benefit SMU employees in the sense that employees' general health and well-being will be improved. Their individual productivity will be enhanced and a sense of being in a team will be created. Improve employee morale and foster work-life balance. SMU believe that implementing EWP does not only improve employee's health and well-being but also works toward embedding well-being into the culture of the institution.

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The following are among the initiatives to be implemented going forward:

- Marketing of wellness services, and setting up an EWP Committee.
- Awareness of Employee Wellness Policy
- Employee Wellness Supervisory training
- Drug and Alcohol Awareness Drive
- Mental Health and Cancer Awareness Drive
- Financial Management Awareness Drive
- Comprehensive Wellness Day Event
- Incapacity and absenteeism management
- Healthy lifestyle drives

What are your short and long term plans for the SMU employees?

My short term wins are to lay down the concrete foundation through organisational analysis to determine the wellness needs and of course in collaboration with relevant stakeholders. We will benchmark on which EW best practice models used by other universities and market the EW services within the university and also capacitate employees on wellness matters. The long term goal is to see a comprehensive and functional employee wellness programme unit that is accessible and contributes to the overall employee well-being of SMU employees and the University.

Does SMU have a workplace wellness programme? What does it entail?

Currently, as SMU we are at a foundation phase whereby the unit is busy with stakeholder engagement and management meetings to determine the priority needs of SMU employees regarding well-being issues. I must proudly say a comprehensive report from MOSO (broker for all medical schemes) has provided some information with regards to this. The employee wellness Implementation plan for 2022 has been drafted and submitted to ED HR for approval before it goes to MANCO for final approval.

Outline your consultation process with employees?

Employees are allowed to walk-in (self-referral), they can also be referred by their respective line manager or supervisor-supervisory/ management referral.

The priority of dealing with the cases depends on the severity and merit of the case after assessment.

Will you be having collaborations with other Units such as the Gender-Based Violence, Psychology Department, just to mention a few?

Yes, collaboration is key to managing and implementing employee programme initiatives. You will agree with me that Gender-Based violence cases have some element(s) of psychosocial issues which makes the unit relevant to partner with. Other departments to collaborate with are the department of sports, physiotherapy, marketing and communication and all medical aid schemes that subscribe to SMU just to mention a few.

Does SMU have an Employee Wellness Policy in place? In summary, what does it entail?

Yes, the employee wellness policy is in place and approved by MANCO. The point of departure is the support of employee and organisational wellness, the objectives as stated in the SMU Employee Wellness Policy must be embraced.

The following are employee wellness objectives as stated in the policy framework; to promote a healthy and productive workforce; meet the wellness needs of employees through preventative and curative measures; promote the physical, social, and emotional wellness of all employees; create an organizational climate and culture that is conducive to wellness, the identification of psycho-social health risks, and the intervention thereof and to promote work-life balance.

What is your message to SMU employees?

Work-related stress, personal, behavioural and health concerns can affect the general well-being of individuals and their functioning at the workplace and/or at home.

My message to SMU employees is simple, let us live the SMU way by embracing our core values which are accountability, effective leadership, efficiency, excellence, integrity, respect, student-centred and Ubuntu as they have a huge impact on our day to day interactions and in turn affect our well-being. We should always remember that **“our well-being is our wealth”**.

Meet Prof Basseyy Marvey – Director of Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance



Prof Basseyy Marvey was recently appointed as the Director: of Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance (IPQA). He is responsible for rendering support to the Executive management of the University by providing leadership in strategy formulation, policy development, and planning directives through benchmarking, analysis and interpretation of relevant information needed for decision-making purposes. Focus on SMU interviewed Prof Marvey to know more about his plans for the IPQA directorate.

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Kindly share with us your life journey from childhood.

The most awesome lesson I learned when growing up was to know that each person is born for a purpose and with destiny. Along with that, the Almighty has strategically located us within a network of community support and destiny helpers to help us reach our full potential. As the African proverb would say “*motho ke motho ka batho ba bangwe*” - which means “I am because you are”. Tells me that one’s achievements in life are a total of the contributions and investments others have made to you no matter how little.

This in turn has taught and instilled in me the grace of compassion and appreciation for those who may be struggling today, knowing that “*the end of the matter is better than its beginning, Eccl 7:8*”. It is this predisposition in life that has made me so easily vulnerable to SMU’s shared values of Ubuntu, Integrity, Respect, Excellence and Accountability, which I so aspire to see manifest in my time at SMU. When faithfully embraced and practised, these values have the potential to become change agents to transform organisational culture and the image of our beloved SMU.

Take us through your career journey.

My career journey span over 3 decades, having begun as a Scientist and Work-Study Officer at a manufacturing company supplying North West platinum mines with chemical explosives. Work-study is a means of enhancing the production efficiency (productivity) of the firm by eliminating unnecessary operations and waste through the application of industrial engineering techniques such as method study and work measurement. Following my industrial experience I went on to further my studies and obtained MSc from Howard University (USA), PhD from PU for CHE (now NWU), MBA in General and Financial Management from NWU and Programme in Total Quality Management (TQM) from Unisa Business School covering Integrated SHEQ management based on ISO and OHSAS system standards. The remaining and largest part of my career was spent in academia where I served in various capacities ranging from instructional/research staff, associate to full professor, campus QA director (NWU), Head of Chemistry (NWU, UL-Medunsa, SMU), Director: Pathology and Preclinical Sciences (UL-Medunsa), Interim Dean: School of Science & Technology (SMU) and Acting Director: Institutional Planning (SMU).

How was your transition from an academic sphere into a strategic position of Director: Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance?

It is against my background in academic leadership, Total Quality Management, SHEQ management standards, OHSAS (Occupational Health and Safety Management Standards), process optimization, and scientific research to name a few, that I was able to easily transition from academia to institutional planning within the academic environment. In my previous role as Quality Director at NWU (Mafikeng Campus), a position I served jointly with my academic responsibilities, I had the opportunity to lead the institution through a national CHE institutional audit, working jointly with the Quality Team at the sister campus in Potchefstroom. Upon joining UL-Medunsa in 2010, I was again tasked with the responsibility of assisting Medunsa Campus to position itself for a similar audit exercise, working jointly with the Quality Team of the sister campus in Turfloop, a responsibility I executed alongside my academic responsibilities as then academic head of Chemistry. Fast-forwarding to recent developments, at the time SMU needed to fill the position of Director of Institutional Planning, an interim person was needed with a unique combination of skills in Planning and Quality Assurance as well as vast experience in academic leadership and management. That is how I assumed the role of Acting Director for the division and held the fort until the process of filling the position was concluded.

In line with the SMU strategic plan 2021-2025, what is your five-year plan for the Institutional Planning Department & Quality Assurance (IPQA)?

Driving on R80 on my way to work, there is a billboard by SMU, with the inscription “home of academic excellence”. To live to that aspiration, management should continually re-imagine SMU to remain at the cutting edge of excellence. This is the interface where I envision the role to be played by Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance function at SMU. As one of SMU’s Critical Success Factors, Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance have a huge task of:

- Ensuring data integrity and reliable management information.
- Conducting market research, impact studies, and benchmarking to stay competitive in the market and to meet client and employer needs
- Ensuring the relevance and sustainability of SMU PQM and the continuous quality improvement of our products and services through Quality Reviews of both academic and support departments.
- Participation in world University rankings such as *Times Higher Education (THE)* and *QS World University Rankings* to promote the brand image of the University globally.

For SMU to be on par with other institutions of higher learning, which key initiatives/projects will you introduce or currently are in place to augment the operational plans of the University in general?


In its role as the provider of HEMIS and institutional research data, IPQA endeavours to assert itself as a single point source of reliable information and provider of data analytics services to provide reliable and timely management information to assist management in making informed decisions. In that regard, IPD has already established management dashboards on POW-ERHEDA, an online tool providing enrolments and efficiency data with graphs, tables, and numeric data to empower management to make fast and data-driven decisions based on the latest information.

During your term of office in the academic sphere, which academic challenges did you come across and what are your plans to address that as the newly appointed Director of Institutional Planning?

SMU is first of all a relatively new institution inheriting the baggage of its predecessors before the demerger. Amongst some challenges already identified by management and captured in the SMU business model are infrastructure constraints and the sustainability of the current PQM.

The current teaching infrastructure is stretched to capacity and can no longer accommodate further growth as proposed in the new business model. A more comprehensive plan on how SMU seeks to address the above challenges and several other related challenges impacting efficiency and sustainability is outlined in the Business Model and Financial Framework document obtainable from the Directorate of Finance.

Through its Academic Planning and Quality Assurance offices, IPQA is working together with academic departments to ensure that new and sustainable programmes in health-related humanities, education, management and law are developed to provide a financial cushion to our current unsustainable PQM.

A portrait of Benjamin Ntshabele, a man with a beard and mustache, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie. He is sitting in a black office chair. The background is a plain wall with a decorative garland hanging from the top.

Meet Benjamin Ntshabele - SMU

Institutional Researcher

Benjamin Ntshabele is an Institutional Researcher in the Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance (IPQA) Department at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU). He has 12 years of experience as a quantitative data analyst, including over 8 years in higher education (HE). He also has extensive experience in technical writing and documentation. Data processing, data analysis, model building, and reporting are also his strengths. His responsibilities include, but are not limited to, assisting in the design and distribution of strategic management information, assisting in management decision-making and strategic planning, and liaising both internally with the Executive Management (including Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Executive Directors, Deans, Directors, and Managers) and externally with the Department of Higher Education (DHET) and Council of Higher Education (CHE). Focus on SMU met with Benjamin to discuss aspects of the Institutional Research in the Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance (IPQA) at SMU.

Who is Benjamin Ntshabele?

Take us through your academic and career journeys. I originate from North West, a village in the Northern part of Rustenburg called Disake. I am a dedicated worker who is well-organized. My academic career began at North-West University, where I earned a BCom Degree in Statistics and a BCom Honours Degree in Statistics. Later, at the University of Pretoria, I pursued a BCom Honours degree with a specialization in Economics. I recently completed my (MPhil) Master of Philosophy with a specialization in Entrepreneurship at the University of Pretoria, and I am currently in my second year of my PhD with a specialization in Entrepreneurship. I have more than 12 years of quantitative data analysis experience (including more than 8 years in Higher Education). In 2009, I started as an intern at Statistics South Africa's data processing unit, and in January 2010, I was hired full-time as a statistical assistant. In June 2010, I was recruited as an Assistant Director/Statistician at the National Operation Center unit of the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development. In 2013, I began working as an institutional researcher at the University of Pretoria. Recently I joined the Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance Department at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University as the Institutional Researcher.

What is your role at SMU?

My role includes, but is not limited to, conducting institutional research, assisting the department with strategic and institutional planning through statistical analysis and modelling, conducting impact studies and surveys such as graduate exit and online teaching and learning surveys; and writing technical reports such as SMU quarterly performance reports and consolidation of SMU-DHET Quarterly Development reports. I am also responsible for gathering data, analysing and submission of World University Rankings which play an important role in global institutional brand recognition, collaboration and partnerships, staff and student recruitment, benchmarking, and providing a platform for the institution to celebrate its achievements in research, teaching, and sustainability. Finally, I liaise internally with the Senior Management and externally with the Department of Higher Education (DHET) and Council of Higher Education (CHE).

Which SMU work-related projects are you currently busy with that impact studies, graduate exit surveys and online teaching & learning surveys?

I am currently designing a graduate exit survey questionnaire and online data collection tool in preparation for the data to be collected during or before graduation. Secondly, in 2021 a report was released regarding online teaching and learning survey. Reports already released include student experiences on online teaching, learning and assessment and the impact of online assessment on modular pass rates. Findings from the online survey revealed some gaps in the online teaching, learning and assessment practice for which recommendations were made and communicated to management for remedial action and policy formulation.

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What does it take for an institution like SMU to start featuring world universities rankings?

The three most prominent and recognized World University Rankings currently available are Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings, Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings, and Shanghai Ranking's Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU). Institutional researchers at SMU must first request that the World Rankings Team create a data submission portal for the university, then collect data to be submitted, and then submit it to the world university ranking data portal. For the first time in 2022, SMU successfully submitted its "rating data" to the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings. Times Higher Education's data is still being verified, and rankings will be released later this year. SMU will start to submit for QS and ARWU in 2023.

When and how can SMU stakeholders access the 2021 institution's annual report (including previous editions)?

SMU places a high value on the achievement of its strategic objectives, and each quarter a performance report is released and presented to DHET in Quarterly Development meetings with SMU, as well as submitted to Council after approval by internal structures. At the end of each year, a consolidated annual report is prepared and signed off by Council after which the audited report should be available on the University intranet for access by the SMU community and stakeholders. Approval of the Annual Report with Consolidated Annual Financial Statements by the Council usually happens by end of June each year.

What are the highlights of SMU academic year 2021?

A central goal of the policy framework for the transformation of the higher education system, as outlined in Education White Paper 3: A programme for the transformation of Higher Education has been to promote equity of access and a fair chance of success for all who are seeking to realize their potential through higher education while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities. As a result, there has been growth towards achieving enrolments targets as outlined in the ministerial enrolment plan 2020/2025. Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic and enforced lockdown acted as a catalyst, compelling universities to reconsider how they teach and assess, resulting in a new normal of multimodal/blended teaching, learning, and assessment. Due to Covid-19, SMU has had to quickly transition to multimodal teaching, learning, and assessment platform as part of its business continuity plan and strategy for the past two years.



Ga-Rankuwa is located about 40 km northwest of Pretoria. This township is home to the only exclusively, health sciences University in the country- Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU). This institution has a rich history with regard to the provision of education to, primarily, black people in Southern Africa. It provided an opportunity for the training of a black child who otherwise could have been denied of any chance of medical/health training

I am sure most of us grew up in villages where we were told that the local doctor or physiotherapist studied at the Medical University of Southern Africa (MEDUNSA), SMU's predecessor, even when we did not know, what or where MEDUNSA was located. Such was the reputation of the quality of the training that the institution provided. It was almost as if to say that it was associated with saving lives. It is no surprise that countrywide, and with all the changes that the institution had gone through, the name MEDUNSA is still held in high regard.

History reminds us that the University of Limpopo (UL) was formed when MEDUNSA and the University of the North merged in 2005, and the subsequent demerger in 2014. Many questions have been asked and continue to be asked. Geographically, these institutions are so far away from each other. What were these people smoking? Don't they care about the historical significance of MEDUNSA?

We are also reminded that the transition from MEDUNSA to becoming a campus of UL, to SMU was a highly emotive and contested process. The residue of such resistance is still evident. These developments have caused so much confusion in such a way that they compromised SMU's ability to create a distinct identity.

Today, whenever the name SMU is mentioned, in some spaces, this is often met with expressions that communicate that there is a degree of unfamiliarity with the name. Most often, we tend to qualify this by saying, "it used to be called MEDUNSA", then it all

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becomes clear. How did we end up here? How did it happen that an institution with such a rich history is less known? Is it in the name? How has this affected the institution's brand and reputation? How has this affected its ability to attract the best students and academics and funding?

Clearly, the constant changes have been a contributing factor in this regard, from MEDUNSA, UL - MEDUNSA Campus and then SMU have contributed to this apparent confusion, resulting in the institution's brand compromised. SMU thus has a mammoth task of regaining lost ground with regard to its positioning in the higher education sector.

In recent times, a quick Google search on the University could bring up several negative stories ranging from prolonged workers and the student strikes to allegations of irregularities regarding the appointment of the Vice Chancellor, Professor Peter Mbatia. By the way, these allegations have been investigated by the University Council which effectively dismissed them as having no basis. Council further reiterated its support for Prof. Mbatia's leadership. All these, however, continue to tarnish SMU's reputation.

In the midst of all these challenges, does it mean that all is lost? Not at all! On the surface, these could be discouraging, but upon closer inspection, there is evidence that SMU is on the rise and on course to reach its evident potential. How, one may ask? A visit to the campus will show all interested parties the infrastructure developments which are meant to address student accommodation challenges, improvement of the working conditions and the development of an institution befitting the privilege of training our future doctors and other health care practitioners.

Anecdotally, there is increasingly, evidence that the changes which have been introduced are beginning to bear fruits. Research-wise, SMU boasts having NRF-SARCHI Chair in Drug Substance Abuse. It hosts the Africa Centre for Tobacco Industry Monitoring and Policy Research. It is also the first in the country to use a unique technique in general surgery. All these from an institution with limited resources are a clear indication that the institution is on the rise.

The involvement of SMU physiotherapists in international initiatives such as the Comrades marathon, which takes place in August 2022, all point to an institution which seeks to produce graduates who are able to appreciate the need for greater exposure beyond their comfort zones.

It is tempting to assume that all is smooth sailing in this restructuring and rebuilding process. This could not be further from the truth. The analogy of a dog, which sleeps under a car, but wakes up and chase the car once it is in motion, could be used here. What am I saying? Of course, there are challenges and pockets of resistance to the evident transformation within the institution. However, the evident resolve towards change presents a strong current, and swimming against the tide will prove very difficult.

The resilience of the institution and its commitment to growth and development in the midst of challenges can be aptly summarized by the Vice Chancellor's famous expression...**"I am an old dog with many scars, what will another scar do to me"**.

Maybe, just maybe this is the kind of dog that SMU needed.



Focus on SMU spoke to Mr Thomas Nkobeneni affectionately known as Bra Tom on his retirement from SMU after 24 years of diligent service. He shared his experiences of being part of this University and working with some of the most eminent academics, medical professionals and colleagues..

HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU BEEN WORKING AT SMU?

Mr Thomas Nkobeneni: The total number of years I have worked at SMU is 24 and it stretches from the year 1997 until 2021. I must also just indicate that I had to serve for a few months up to 2022 after my retirement while the process to find a suitable person to take over was being finalized.

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YOU ARE ONE OF THE LUCKY ONES WHO HAVE THE PRIVILEGE OF HAVING WORKED AT THREE UNIVERSITIES IN ONE LIFE TIME?

Nkoben: So true! As you can gather from the number of years I have indicated above, I joined this institution in 1997. Approximately 19 Years after its founding in 1978. At the time, it was called Medical University of Southern Africa (MEDUNSA). Later, under the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) re-structuring program led by the late minister, Dr Kader Asmal, the University merged with the former University of the North (UNIN) and formed what became known as the University of Limpopo (UL). In 2015 the two campuses de-merged and SMU was established, and I continued at this campus until 2021.

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Being part of this flagship institution of higher education focusing on health sciences education and serving the whole Southern African Region has been a privilege to me. Looking back as someone who has just retired, I am proudly entering my old age with a sense of accomplishment and proper self-esteem. I too have served with distinction and I feel that I have been loyal to my country and the rest of humanity. Needless to mention, this philanthropic duty of mine has contributed to the production of life savers (doctors, dentists, etc.) and has made the core business of this institution a success.

WHAT WERE YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AT SMU?

Nkoben: As a medical photographer attached to the Medical Illustration and Audio-Visual Services (MIAAVS) within this institution, my job entailed the following:



- Capturing of images during operations in theatres, clinics, studio photos, group photos for departments and students
- Taking summative assessment patients' photos of final year BDS students' practical's
- Recording videos of second year medical students' practical's at Skill Centre
- Recording videos of final year speech and audiology practical's
- Generation of learning material that became highly useful in Teaching and Learning
- Capturing University activities such as functions, graduations, conferences and workshops

WHAT IS IT THAT YOU WILL MISS NOW THAT YOU ARE ON RETIREMENT FROM SMU?

Nkoben: I will miss working in the company of students and doctors at theatres and clinics, the collegiality, keeping abreast with latest developments in technology. One learned and always tried to live by the principles of harmony and opted for better ways of resolving conflicts when they arose. I believe all of us should strive to build better human relations in the workplace.

WHAT IS THE LEGACY THAT YOU LEFT HAVING WORKED IN MIAAVS OVER THE YEARS?

Nkoben: Several activities and incidents readily come into mind. These include leaving the institution that gave me a chance in life still functional; mentoring the talent that the university has recruited in the space where I operated. The crowning of my legacy could perhaps be viewed against one of the most outstanding and monumental acts of institutional branding exercise which was led by Prof Sam Mokgokong, former Head of the Department of Neurosurgery at MEDUNSA and Dr Ben Carson, renowned Neurosurgeons of the time, when they separated the conjoined Banda twins in 1998. I happened to be part of the MIAAVS crew that was led by Mr Hoosain Ebrahim, documenting that historic operation. To this day, this successful surgery remains etched in my memory.

This 22-hour non-stop operation put this institution on the world map and among some of the greatest feats in the history of medicine in modern times. The images I participated in producing were internationally revered and 20 years later, the beneficiaries of that human endeavour are still alive, and my heart leaps with joy every time I recall this incident.

Bra Tom wished the University well as he now focuses on the next chapter of his life. He is looking forward to continue working on Photography and videography assignments following retirement from formal employment.



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27 - 30 June 2022

For enquiries:

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SEFAKO MAKGATHO
HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

AFRICA MONTH CELEBRATION

*'Strengthen resilience in nutrition
and food Security on the African Continent'*



**19-20 MAY
2022**



SMU



Strictly Traditional Attire

**Guest Speaker's Topic :
"Food Security and Nutrition in Africa"**

Subtopics:

- 1. What impact did COVID-19 have on food security and nutrition in the African continent, who are most vulnerable to food security?**
- 2. The role of Government and Non-government Organizations in combatting food insecurity in Africa.**
- 3. Improving policy coherence for food security and nutrition in Africa (the role of academia in government policy making processes)**

Staff and Students are invited!!!!.

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KNOWLEDGE FOR QUALITY HEALTH SERVICES Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University @SMU_SA smu_sa SMU TV