



SMU Alumna
establishes
a Commercial
Gym Company -
**CEO Dr Hajira
Mashego**

SMU Alumni
pledge support
to the University

SMU Alumnus
Dr Seshoka Muila -
Acting CEO of the biggest
Hospital in Limpopo

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SMU Alumnus Dr Seshoka Muila is Acting CEO of the biggest Hospital in Limpopo

SMU Alumnus Dr Seshoka Muila is at the helm of Mankweng Hospital - a Tertiary and Academic facility in the Limpopo province. He commends current MEC for Health in the province Dr Phophi Ramathuba and her executive for believing in young people and for taking a risk by appointing him when many thought he was still young. He took the opportunity and never disappointed. He received his MBChB degree from the then Medunsa now SMU. Dr Muila is currently busy with a Masters in Management of Finance and Investments (MMFI) with the Wits Business School and also holds a Master of Business Administration Degree from the University of Limpopo. We spoke to him about his journey to the top.

When did you start working at Mankweng hospital and at what point were you appointed as Acting CEO?

I came to this facility in September 2018 when I was requested by the MEC and her executive to come and act as the clinical executive director until the end of 2019 when I was permanently appointed to the position. I continued to work in the position until my appointment in September 2021 as the Acting Chief Executive Officer following the retirement of the erstwhile incumbent.



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What is the category of Mankweng hospital?

Mankweng is a Tertiary and Academic hospital. The services provided here are very specialized in their nature and some are exclusively provided by this facility in the province and all of them make the hospital to be unique and some hospitals refer patients here. It is also academic because of the undergraduate and post graduate training it provides mainly for students from the university of Limpopo. The students who are training at the university do their practicals mainly in this institution as well as Pietersburg hospital. We also have postgraduate training programmes that have full accreditation such as in the field of pediatrics and child health and have a well-developed clinical department that has produced many specialists as well as General surgery and other disciplines which have partial accreditation. There is a research of component as well and all these are defining features of what an academic hospital is.

Moreover, because of its location, the surrounding communities are still entitled to services offered by the facility including services that would ordinarily be provided by a district or regional hospital. We cannot turn our people away.

What are the main responsibilities as CEO and those in your substantive position?

The role of the office in the main is to provide strategic direction of the institution. To align the strategy with the resources available such as human resources, financial and so on. To look for resources where we are in short so that we are able to fulfill the mandate given to us as a tertiary and academic hospital. All these gets to be measured through the level of quality that our clients receive, patients and other stakeholders. We know that the quality of care provided to our patients is the ultimate measure of how well the institution is doing. Secondary to that we are responsible for the production of health care professionals with new knowledge; the nurses and doctors we train here should be on par with those produced by other Universities. We need to produce qualified and dedicated men and women who will work in our communities.

In the area of Research, I am entrusted with the responsibility to ensure that with the data we have in this facility, we must be able to share with the world what we see in this facility, for instance, how we deal with malaria, HIV and Aids, issues of pediatric congenital abnormalities, which are prevalent in this area.

There are other responsibilities undertaken on a day to day basis including meetings with various stakeholders and internally. For instance, Mondays are hectic days and we schedule no meetings as we all take stock of what happened over the weekend and each manager should zoom into their areas. Tuesdays are meant for meetings wherein we receive presentations from various heads of directorates. There are 6 directorates that report directly to the CEO. I also embark on walks in the hospitals to talk to people on the ground to hear

directly from them, in the wards, maintenance section, mortuary, residences, patients etc. I also have standing external meetings with the University of Limpopo, the department and other external stakeholders.

In the substantive position, one is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that clinical care services run efficiently in alignment of the vision of the facility and in line with performance parameters laid by the department. It's a huge task to ensure for instance that all clinical departments, pharmacy manager, head of clinical psychology, head of allied etc. ensure that patients are treated, drugs are available, adverse events are prevented and so on. If adverse events happen, they should be reported so that we can learn from them and come up with mitigating measures. The person works closely with the school of medicine. For now, there is someone acting in the role as I focus on the responsibilities of CEO. This facility is big with 550 beds and operating at just over a 500 million budget. Some years back the hospital operated at over 700 million and this figure has dropped due to budget cuts.

Take us through your early days, where did you grow up, your early school years and how did you land up at SMU?

I Come from Venda, in a township called Vleifontein. I got C symbols with only 1 B of Geography with my grade 12 and always wanted to be a doctor. Firstly, I look at medicine as one of those noble careers. I have been exposed to harsh realities as a child in terms of upbringing such as poverty. I saw people suffer including children. I once slept on the hospital benches as a child waiting to be circumcised. I stayed in casualty for the whole night until a nurse came to attend to me. So as I sat on the benches, I saw many people coming in and out and this made me curious and I felt I wanted to work in such an environment to treat patients. This motivated me. My mother is a professional nurse and she always motivated me that one day I can be a good Doctor.

I was accepted at Wits and Medunsa. Because my mother worked in Pretoria at the time, she said I must go to Medunsa because of proximity to her workplace. So in 2007, I started in Medunsa campus of the University of Limpopo and was elected class representative during my second year.

I then became a mentor to first entering students and was elected into the SRC in 2010 and served as the financial aid officer. I found myself having to repeat a block in 2011 after obtaining 49 percent in obstetrics and gynecology. The following year in 2012 got a distinction on the same module and started my final year in March 2012. Things took a dramatic turn in my final year but for the better. I got distinctions in all my blocks except pediatrics and child health. I was the best student of the class of 2012 and overall psychiatry and got a medal from the South African Society of Psychiatrists.

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When and where did your professional journey begin?

I completed my studies in 2013 February and started internship on March 2013 at Tshilidzini hospital in Vhembe. I did internship for 2 years and during that period, I joined the Junior Doctors Association of South Africa, an interest group of SAMA and became its provincial treasurer in 2014 and subsequently became treasurer general at national level.

These positions exposed me to leadership. In 2016 I was the national internship coordinator at HPCSA which was a subcommittee of the board. I also did my Community service at Tshilidzini hospital and then moved to Pietersburg hospital in 2016. It was during that year that I wrote primary exams for neurosurgery with the College of Medicines of South Africa and passed. I always wanted to do neurosurgery and while working as a medical officer neuro surgery, I applied for Registrar positions at Charlotte Maxeke and Groote Schuur hospital and was accepted at both institutions. However, I could not take any of those as my colleagues and I realized that the Province of Limpopo needed administrators who were fully conscious and ready to move from where it was to a new direction. I then agreed with a colleague and friend who was also passionate about neurosurgery to go pursue it while I remained in the province. At this point, one was seriously engaged as a provincial secretary of the South African Medical Association (SAMA). A position which exposed me to the many challenges that prevailed in the health sector at the time such as poor services in facilities, lack of accountability, management of facilities etc.

I spent some time to learn more about the health system, its challenges and opportunities while serving at SAMA. So in 2017, there were positions advertised for senior clinical managers across the province. We encouraged many people in our ranks to apply for the positions because we knew that the only way to change the situation was to create a balance where people who understood the challenges were encouraged to go into administrative positions so that they could work together in resolving them. I however, restrained myself from applying for those positions and wanted to focus on the organization. We knew that once those who used to be on the other side of the fence were employed in those positions, we will turn to them to say this is the right moment to implement measures that will turn around the institutions and address the many challenges they used to talk about in the union.

It was in September 2018 when I was then requested to go and serve at the Mankweng hospital to head clinical care services following a decision of the Limpopo Exco in the department of health. This is where I am today and with a much bigger responsibility.

I am grateful to the MEC Phophi Ramathuba for giving me the opportunity to do this job, I am fully aware that it could have

been someone else. These things never happened before her time. I am also thankful to the executive team that work with me for the support.

I was only 30 when I arrived at the Mankweng and this attracted a lot of issues with some saying I will fail due to my age. It is such comments that made me to be strong and wanted to succeed to prove the critics wrong. Failure was not an option as this would have been a betrayal to people of my age and those who entrusted me with the responsibility.

What are your Highlights and achievements in the roles you occupied at Mankweng hospital?

The biggest highlight for me was when we performed the first open heart surgery at Mankweng. Many never thought this will happen especially under the leadership of a young person. This happened in 2019. Such an operation was last done in the province 16 years ago and we brought it back. The theatres at the time were not in the state that they were currently. I was encouraged by the desires of the experienced medical practitioners who were willing to come back to the Province to work at the facility. The operation was a success and the patient is still alive. Many could not believe that this happened in a facility under the leadership of a young person whom so many felt was not ready.

Secondly, the facility at the time did not have many specialists and my immediate task was to address this challenge in order for the hospital to function optimally. Under my leadership, today the hospital boasts three ophthalmologists compared to 1 when I joined, there was no pediatric surgery department at all when one arrived here and all babies who came with some challenges they could not deal with were referred to Dr George Mukhari Academic hospital. I am happy to say that today the department exists with 2 specialists. There was no foeto-maternal medicine unit, a highly specialized unit with obstetrics and gynecology and it was established. The facility has 12 specialists in obstetrics and gynecology. In general surgery, there are three more specialists. There has been a huge improvement in terms of the service offering provided by the hospital to the people of Limpopo.

I must add that the tertiary facility previously functioned in isolation without supporting the regional hospitals and this has changed since we came and started with outreach programmes to regional hospitals to the rural areas to operate patients. We now have four specialists in plastic and reconstructive surgery.

We also applied a different recruitment and retention strategy. What we did in recruiting and retaining the people, we had to actively go out and engage them with proposals for them to buy into the vision we have for the province. I am happy that many bought into the vision and many are still here serving the people of Limpopo.

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We also introduced the first excellence awards for the institution which focused on all areas. The resources we used during the awards were raised externally and no money was used from the hospital. The intent of the awards was to recognize and motivate every employee from the level of the cleaner to the professor to boost morale and ensure that everyone rally behind the vision to provide excellent services. This took place in March 2022. What was humbling about this was that the two colleagues who won the prize told us it was for the first time they went for a retreat in a lodge and getting spa treatment and being driven in a luxury car. Such stories keep me moving. I really enjoy to see other people happy.

The recognition of other areas such as clinical psychology was also one of my priorities. When I came here, the conditions they worked under were not conducive. The services were constantly interrupted by noise and they were isolated to the far side of the hospital. I decided to ensure that they were given new buildings so that they had a proper environment to operate from. The area was opened in 2021 and I am proud of that achievement. The hospital also boasts a staff clinic today which was not in existence.

Being a student at SMU, how was the environment then?

To me I experienced more positive things, what I appreciated the most was the location of the Institution. It being far from the city was good because you were either at the library, cafeteria with other students or at the residential area. If you had to go to town, you needed money which most of us did not have. This unconsciously channels you to spend more time with your books.

It was easy to adjust because of the type of people we met, majority of whom were of the same background with us. These were students from very poor backgrounds and we were comforted that, we dressed the same, we ate the same food and you realized that your own situation was similar to that of others. The cafeteria sold food that we could relate to. The university was generally friendly. Even if you did not have money, the university made room for arrangements on how you could still pay your fees. When I compared with my friends from other institutions, the situation was totally different in that if you were unable to pay fees, you were excluded. This was a facility that made one to feel at home.

In terms of medicine, what we were taught were more practical things. I was taught how to treat Malaria, HIV and AIDS, TB and other, which are common diseases you come across. I was taught the content that was relevant to my people.

What should SMU do differently moving forward?

Our university still lack in terms of research especially in the area of publishing in journals. For instance, if you go through the South African Medical Journal, most articles come from other universities. When you look at data, you realize that Universities such as SMU are rich in terms of data of different pathologies. The university needs to invest more in this area. What defines a university and puts it on the map globally is its research output. Improving on this will take the institution to another level faster.

Of course there are departments such as General Surgery headed by Professor Zach Koto which one can argue that is operating at a level similar to other top universities in terms of how people are taught. I personally benefitted from the leadership of Prof Koto during my final year. I wish many could emulate what his department does in terms of producing specialists and in the area of research.

I also believe that there is an opportunity for SMU to design courses tailor made for health care professionals and executives such as MBA specifically for health management. If SMU was to also design such a programme, it will be to the benefit of many and the University. I will be the first one to enroll for such a programme at SMU. We need to look at Corporate management in health, finance in health etc. and this can be offered online.

You were spotted at the 2022 SMU graduations ceremonies, what were you doing there?

I came with my wife Lethabo who was receiving her Masters Degree in Clinical Psychology. We met at SMU while I was still a student and only started dating in 2013 when I was an intern at Tshildizini hospital. She remained at SMU to finish her studies and we later got married in 2015 while she was still doing an Honours Degree at SMU. We are blessed with 2 children and expecting a third one.





SMU Alumni pledge support to the University

SMU Vice-Chancellor Prof Peter Mbatlana accompanied by officials from Communication and Marketing recently met with the Executive committee members of the SMU/Medunsa Alumni Association in Bryanston to discuss a variety of matters that affect the structure and the University. All members of the executive namely; Dr Solly Motlanthe, Dr Tiny Mhinga, Dr Zakes Motene, Dr Phil Makume, Ms Karabo Raphokoane and Dr Thabiso Matlaila formed part of the meeting.

The Vice-Chancellor used the occasion to take them through the projects that are currently under way and proposed future projects and invited them to support their Alma mater. He also informed them about the Harambee initiative which seeks to raise funds for needy students. Through Harambee, the University wants to raise 1 million rand and staff, students, Alumni and corporates are urged to make contributions to the fund.

Amongst the key projects that the VC spoke about were the 2000 and 800 beds facilities, the ICT infrastructure project, the water reticulation project, the electron microscope unit, the animal facility and the creation of the centre for pandemics, proposed new administrative building and the students centre as well as the commercialization of SMU land which will create ample opportunities for businesses to participate. Prof Mbatlana revealed that transactional advisors have already been appointed for this purpose. He called on Alumni to lend a hand in ensuring that the University achieve these planned projects and to participate in the building of the University so that it takes its rightful place in the higher education space. He also emphasized that the University is now doing things in such a way that it brings to the fore the centrality of the academic project and that it was vital for academics to feel that they were respected and honoured as they have been in the periphery for too long. He also informed the committee of the new organizational structure that is in place to ensure efficiency of the institution.

Speaking at the meeting, Alumni Chairperson Dr Solly Motlanthe said when they came to the University for a reunion in 2013, they were appalled to find the University in the state it was, they felt that very little has changed. They took a decision to come together to contribute to the life of the University and a decision was taken to form the Alumni Association in 2015.

Majority of the members indicated that they were initially not enticed by the idea to rename the University as they felt that they were becoming step children and taken away from their parent body. However, they pointed out that they had to eventually embrace the SMU name and move on.

The Alumni executive pledged their support to the University in Particular the vision and plans as presented by the Vice-Chancellor. They requested to be part of the process of bringing together Alumni and Convocation under one structure so that it will be easier to work together. Furthermore, the executive made it clear that they wanted to see proper systems that will ensure that the Alumni and the University work together seamlessly. They requested the university to expedite the process of cleaning and updating of the Alumni data from different generations so that many can start making meaningful contributions to SMU as a place where their umbilical chords fell.

The members also felt that the University needs to revitalize veterinary sciences and offer those qualifications as part of increasing its capacity. Veterinary Alumni are most ready to lend support to the development of the faculty and to raise the SMU flag to support food security programs in South Africa and the continent. They also called on the relevant government departments to support SMU as a special project.

Members also received an update on the imminent Golf Day that is expected to take place in November this year – a project that is used by Alumni to raise funds for the University.

The executive committee used the occasion to unanimously choose Dr Tiny Mhinga to be the Patron of the Harambee Fund. This move is expected to give the necessary impetus to the fund to reach as many people as possible to make contributions.





SMU VC Prof Peter Mbatia launches the Harambee Fund to help needy students

SMU Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Mbatia has pledged to donate R10 000 once off payment to the Harambee Annual Fund. Mbatia made this announcement during the launch of the fund on 18 July 2022 and further committed to contribute R1000 every month and urged all staff members to complete the employee deduction forms to make their monthly contributions.

Mbatia explained that Harambee - a Swahili word, means coming together of a community to assist each other to achieve a common purpose. The proceeds of this fund is to help academically deserving yet financially constrained students.

He further emphasized that the SMU Annual Fund will be the University's umbrella strategy to raise funds through various activities targeting own internal staff and students, Convocation and Alumni, business and foundations at both national and international levels.

"My dream is that ALL the staff members at SMU will find it within their hearts to become part of this unique SMU initiative by making monthly contributions towards the fund, thereby becoming guardians of our needy students. It takes a village to raise a child. Let the spirit of Harambee live in us" said the VC. I have a lot of faith that the spirit of Ubuntu that lives in all of us will be our guiding conscience, and that this initiative that we have launched today will be sustained year round, he said.

SRC President Philani Mdakane used the occasion to challenge everyone to make a minimal contribution of R67. Let us use the 67 minutes of Mandela day and turn it into R67 contribution for this important cause. He pledged to make a personal contribution of R670 in line with the theme for Nelson Mandela Day. Mdakane said the SRC cannot turn a blind eye when students go to sleep without a meal. He said the spirit of giving must first start with the SMU community before soliciting contributions externally. He said this year the SRC helped more than 300 students through the hands of compassion as compared to previous years.

"The target is to have all staff members to contribute a certain amount to the fund on a monthly basis. A number of the executive and senior management team have pledged to contribute R500 every month. This fund will ensure that vulnerable students can pursue their academic dreams with dignity and in a caring environment", explained the Vice-Chancellor.



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Ms Karabo Raphokoane who is a lecturer and an Executive member of of the University Alumni, urged all alumni to make a contribution to the fund. She hinted that the University's alumni is willing to make a contribution and is supportive of initiatives of this nature. She committed to rally them to support the initiative through various activities. Ms Raphokoane reminded everyone that the same Alumni came to the rescue of students when Covid-19 hit our shores by contributing R25 000 towards their transportation. She further called on alumni that are on Campus to heed the call Dr Tshifhiwa Mulaudzi, the Chairperson of Nehawu encouraged staff members and students to make their contribution to the fund. "It takes a village to raise a child, all of us seated here are products of people who believed in us. Somebody somewhere made sacrifices", said Mulaudzi. He said by making contributions, this will encourage others elsewhere to do the same. He said it is difficult for students to function optimally when they are hungry and called on everyone including big corporates to make contributions to the Harambee Fund. Mulaudzi also said he will climb Mount Kilimanjaro as part of raising funds for students.

The APSA/SAPTU union Chairperson Mr Monedi Lekabe also pledged support to the initiative. "The Vice-Chancellor alone cannot resolve the magnitude of the social ills of the past. It is for this reason that we request the whole SMU community to make a meaningful contribution to this Harambee fund to achieve the goal of raising the 1 million rand", said Lekabe.



SMU Alumna establishes a Commercial Gym Company - CEO Dr Hajira Mashego



SMU Alumna **Dr Hajira Mashego**'s childhood dream was to become a motor mechanic, but she was discouraged by her teachers as it was seen to be a male career. She then decided to follow in her father's footsteps and study Physio-therapy. She says she did not enjoy clinical physiotherapy as much as he did, though, so after three years of clinical work she registered with Wits University and completed an Advanced Diploma in sport and exercise physiotherapy. She then strengthened it with an Advanced Diploma in Sport Management from the then Rand Afrikaans University (RAU), now known as the University of Johannesburg (UJ).

She then lectured at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and slowly fell in love with the fitness and conditioning component of sports science. During that time, she pursued and obtained a master's degree in public health where her thesis was in Fitness. Her career then progressed where she worked as an executive manager at the Sports Commission, the National Sports & Recreation department, and the Mpumalanga Provincial Sports & Recreation Department. During this time, she decided to pursue her PhD in Human Movement Science where her Thesis was also in Fitness. After obtaining a PhD, she then decided to learn how to turn her knowledge into a business. She then registered with the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) and completed a one-year programme

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in social entrepreneurship. On completion of the programme she then resigned from her work and founded Fitness Junction (Pty) Ltd in 2018. *SMU Alumni reporter* interviewed Dr Mashego to get insight into her gym business.

Kindly introduce Fitness Junction to our readers

Fitness Junction is a provider of health, wellness and sports solutions. Health clubs (commercial gyms), corporate gyms, home gyms, sports science & medicine services and research services are the key offerings of our business model. Our first health club is located at Westview in Pretoria West and are planning to have new clubs throughout South Africa. We are focused on addressing the need for health clubs in townships and rural areas, in addition, we offer research services, corporate gym and home gym solutions, fitness, sport and business consultancy services and other related goods and services. Fitness Junction is a 100% Black-owned company with a BBBEE Level 1.

What does your typical working day involve?

Our gym opens at 5 am and closes at 9pm. We have fourteen staff members that work on a two-shift system. We also have eight freelance aerobics instructors who provide the morning and afternoon aerobics and spinning classes. My responsibility as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is to ensure all the human resources, sales, marketing, administration, operations, finance and corporate governance aspects of the business are managed on a day-to-day basis.

How important do you think that gym instructors are nowadays especially since there is so much information regarding health and fitness available on the internet?

The information does not translate to implementation. There was an upsurge of online fitness programmes during the peak of the Covid-19 lockdown period and most fitness clubs (including Fitness Junction) pivoted to also offer online classes and programmes. When the country opened up again online participation plummeted as people returned to physical clubs. Gyms are not only about fitness, but they are also social platforms and clients need physical interaction and guidance from fitness instructors. Currently, a lot of fitness clubs are recruiting fitness instructors as the demand for physical classes is now on the increase.

How do you keep your fitness knowledge up to date?

I read industry journals and publications. I also read a lot of fitness magazine articles to stay abreast of fitness fads and trends.

What techniques do you employ to increase your clientele?

I have an in-house sales team that is composed of three staff members. They use cold calls, activations, distribution of flyers, prospecting, etc. to attract clients to the gym. We also

advertise various promotions and specials to lure potential members. Once a month we host an aerobics marathon where all members of the community are welcome to attend for free. We then use the event to create leads and close sales. I also have an outsourced online marketing service provider who manages our website, Facebook and Instagram pages. These online platforms are used to engage potential clients and retain current clients. Currently, we have 1130 members.

What challenges do you come across in your business?

The barriers to entry in this business are very high. The equipment is very expensive, and the shopping centre leasing costs are also exorbitant. It, therefore, takes very long to become comfortably profitable but once you reach profitability, it is worthwhile.

Have you ever thought of creating franchise opportunities through your business?

Yes, I am currently finalising our franchise model which we plan to launch in a few months. The aim is for Fitness Junction to have a national network of head office-managed and franchise gyms. I am also in the final stages of working on opening a second gym.

What is your advice to anyone looking to break into your industry?

The fitness pie is very big, and we are only scraping the surface. I think that this is the perfect time to enter the industry as the population is very health conscious and is looking for opportunities to improve their health profiles following the Covid-19 scourge.

As an alumna of SMU, what can you say of your Alma Mater?

MEDUNSA/SMU has always been and will remain the home of champions. I am very proud to be an alumna of MEDUNSA (now known as SMU) as that is where I was sculptured to be the professional that I am today. Even though I am not a practising physiotherapist anymore, the ethical and professional principles that I learned during my formative days of studying at my Alma Mater still inform the decisions that I make today.

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Q & A

with the SMU Alumna Dr Zukiswa Gonya

SMU Alumna Dr Zukiswa Gonya found an interest in a field not explored by many which is aviation medicine of which she has recently achieved a certificate with a distinction. Currently, she is enrolled for Master of Business Administration (MBA) in health management with Unicaf University, which is a pan-African, independent, and internationally recognised institution. She is preparing herself for management role in the future and integrate paediatrics or psychiatry as a niche into aviation and then the management thereof.

She likes making a difference in people's lives through practising medicine and finds appreciation from community members most rewarding. She is the people's person and is grateful to God that she doesn't work with computers or papers but with people. It's a source of drive for her to wake up each day to serve the needy. Recently, she was elected as the Secretary General of South African Medical Association Trade Union (SAMATU) for Chris Hani Branch, in Eastern Cape. SMU Alumni newsletter reporter caught up with Dr Gonya who shared her career plans.

Why you did specifically decide to study at SMU?

SMU is a house of Legends, rich in the black health professionals' history. The first black doctors, specialists in particular are proud alumni of SMU previously known as MEDUNSA. Some legends continue to walk the passages of SMU and corridors of Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital (DGMH) like Prof Koto - Surgeon and Prof Mntla - Cardiologist, Prof Mabuza - Fam Med, Prof Lebone - Anatomy and the late Prof Ogunbanjo- Fam Med, the list is endless. These are stalwarts in Medicine that inspire us to achieve; be innovative and make a difference in the field despite our backgrounds. By the virtue of the development of this university in the 1970s, one can understand the vibrant political landscape at SMU which as a political activist myself could not escape.

After my BSc degree, I had a choice of studying MBChB elsewhere but I had grown fond of my campus. I had grown spiritually, politically and academically. I appreciated the academic support and the open-door policy from our departments as well as the student-friendly financial support at SMU was exceptional compared to other universities. I was yet to see a financially excluded student. The SRC would also donate to hands of compassion for student support. I am proud of SMU.

What persuaded you to study and become a Medical Practitioner?

My understanding as I was growing up was that the medical profession

is associated with prestige and honour, though I grew up saying I want to be a doctor when asked by adults as a child, I soon realised it was a profession reserved for certain racial groups with very few black practitioners to look up to, let alone women. The desire grew stronger when I was working having studied for a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree.

It darned me that I had accepted to achieve less and had allowed societal pressures to dictate to me that as a woman it is almost impossible to achieve great things or be a female honourable doctor. At least I came across female doctors and got inspired to try. I am also passionate about community development, being an advocate for others and a beacon of hope for other women. My school teachers predicted that I would become a doctor and none of them is surprised now especially those from primary school. I was treating one of them in hospital and she remembered that I used to be her number one. I decided to leave my job to pursue my dream of becoming a doctor. Working as a medical practitioner gives me so much gratification.

You have acquired multiple qualifications in diverse areas, how is that contributing to your current profession of being a medical doctor?

I gained soft skills that assist me as a professional. MBChB is a very scientific and clinical course and yet we get faced with administrative and personnel issues when in the field of work. Further studies also required skills in research not taught in medical school. I am fortunate to have studied a BA degree that assisted with a holistic approach to patient management, time management, personnel and communication skills. The science learned in my BSc degree kept me afloat in the MBChB course helping me not to repeat any year and pass with understanding. I still find myself explaining physiology to my colleagues in casualty as the knowledge complements my current profession.

How do you stay up-to-date on current events in the medical and healthcare industries?

We were taught the importance of evolution and the influence of technology in our field. The love of research and reading goes hand in hand with keeping up with developments in this industry. Social media propagates a lot of information but one needs to be careful and rather depend on reputable sources like Medscape and Journals that are peer-reviewed. I subscribe to and read newsletters and or articles of the latter to keep up with current events, I follow the social and official pages of SMU to keep up and listen to the News on television and radio. I also follow the official web pages of the department of health.

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I also attend online webinars or lectures from different universities or organizations like Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), Buffalo City Municipality Amathole District's Medical Initiative for rural doctors and Medscape, while earning Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points which is a requirement from HPCSA to engage ourselves in continuing learning.

How do you approach discussing unpleasant topics with patients and their families?

I have learnt to appreciate teamwork with other health professionals like nurses and psychologists or social workers. They make this part of the job bearable and one cannot solve all problems alone. Multi-disciplinary team approach and the presence of a witness or support have helped me in approaching those unpleasant topics, honesty and truth wrapped with compassion have done the trick for me.

Name all the other awards, you won previously

- Award for achieving a Distinction and most participating in the course – Aviation medical examiner's course.
- Helping hands Doctor Leratong Hospital.
- Extraordinary Phenomenal Woman by SMU VC & Phenomenal Woman Non-Government Organisation (NGO).
- Sanlam Abacon Leadership Trophy Award, Class of Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBChB) 2018.
- Overall Top Student at Human Ecology Department fourth-year student University of Western Cape Town (UWC).
- Academic Certificates: Best Third-year student at UWC.
- Academic Certificate and Floating Trophy Best Department Student at Fourth-year student UWC.
- Bronze medal for Ladies' Soccer.
- Silver medal for Good performance in Debating at UWC
- Academic Scroll in Grade 12 for overall best performance

What are the highlights of your Medical career?

The realization that it is not all beds and roses in the medical field. Not all of us are willing to work in challenging environments with scarce resources, especially in the rural district areas. When I had lost a job because our provincial government did not have the finances to remunerate us as we transitioned from Community services to medical officer, which was an awakening moment for me. I had worked hard and sacrificed my resources when I transported a child and a mother to a provincial hospital due to a lack of ambulances but later found myself having to picket in front of the provincial offices with my colleagues for a vacancy. I most appreciated it when my hospital did everything to reinstate me because they shared they could not afford to lose me as they had seen how dedicated, knowledgeable and diligent I was. As it stands, some of my colleagues in the Eastern Cape are still unemployed since January. This is when I appreciated working with honour even when you think no one is watching is important.

What challenges did you face as a student?

Except for the challenges stated above, I chose to stand with other students in their struggle because as I believe, an injury to one is an injury to all. The issue of entry to MBChB remains a thorny issue for most students, especially those starting with BSc hoping to graduate into medicine. It is an emotionally taxing experience that I went through and later championed in my term of office as the Chairperson of the school of medicine.

I also share the suffering of lack of student fees as a bursary holder myself, the application process can be tedious and much reassurance is needed, that is why as the then Treasurer of SRC together with the SRC President we embarked on a journey to bring to book the health department of Limpopo when students in my 5th-year class were at risk of being financially excluded. I also formed part in meetings held with

the national office of NSFAS to address the timely release of funds to qualifying students as early as January when it is most needed as opposed to April each year.

Who do you consider as your role model?

I look up to a few role models in my life as they inspire me differently. The woman whose life was a book for us to read through testing times she never gave up, Mrs Winnie Mandela. She taught us perseverance and the will to prosper. Being in the health field herself, the non-righteous treatment of patients; the apparent poverty and inequalities fuelled many health conditions that our people were suffering from. This drove her to politics and to be an advocate for others, but eventually suffered for standing up for others.

I also draw lessons from Honourable Dr Nkosazana Zuma, a medical doctor by profession who involved herself in uncomfortable battles of women to save women's lives. She is part of the delegation that championed the right to reproductive health because women were dying in numbers due to illegal abortions. She also passed the law around secondary smoking which meant people could not smoke indoors in public places anymore resulting in good public health outcomes. I look up to my mother and aunt who are single parents and never gave in to the challenges of raising children alone. All these contribute to shaping my life going forward.

As an alumna of SMU, what do you miss about SMU?

I dearly miss the vibrant campus, buzzing with different student activities, social and spiritual, opportunities to grow in leadership, those student conferences or workshops where we would spend weekends deliberating on issues of safety, access to higher education, and student funding, sports, etc.

I miss my lecturers and admin staff at Clinical Pathology building, always friendly where everyone knew each other by name. The nightlife of campus residences, chanting and dancing in the parking lots as we came from our student political party meetings, the battles of constituting SRCs and the appreciation from students for championing their struggles. I miss hanging out by the cafeteria and attending concerts organized by the department of marketing. Great times indeed.

What advice can you share with our readers regarding your academic journey?

The main advice is for students not to forget the main objective of being on campus. Appreciate the opportunities received especially the privilege of tertiary funding. Participate in student activities but prioritise your studies to complete them on time and vacate. Leave space and resources for others. Getting a salary is rewarding, so everyone must study, pass, finish and go to work as our people need us in the communities.

Family: Are you married, do you have kids?

I am currently happily single and a mother of one child.

What are your hobbies?

I love reading, singing and listening to music. I participate in community outreach programs in my church like the soup kitchen. I run the church clinic where I render screening and clinical examinations for free to disadvantaged communities supported by donations from several businessmen and General Practitioners.

Social Media Handles: What are your social media handles?

Facebook: Zukie Gonya

Instagram: dr.zukie

Twitter: @Zukiswa21789532



Oral Health challenges pushed Amukelani Ngobene to follow the field

Born and bred in Tshivhuyuni village (Mashamba), Limpopo, 33-year-old Amukelani “AJ” Ngobene recently qualified as an Oral Hygienist at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University. AJ is passionate about his career choice and aims to study further focusing on dental public health. He also hopes to run his dental mobile clinic in rural areas and provide more oral health solutions to those less fortunate citizens of our country. His plans include returning to his Alma Mater and contributing immensely to growing the School of Oral Health Sciences (SOHS) and the university in general. He is currently working at Macheeni Medical centre in Soshanguve Block H, north of Pretoria. *He opened up to share his passion.*

What persuaded you to study and become an Oral Hygienist?

I've always been about specifics and/or specialities. The idea behind choosing Oral Hygiene was also fuelled by some oral health challenges I had, for example, I had impacted wisdom teeth from about 2011 and I kept on ignoring the pain until I was forced to extract it in 2014 because of the pain was always recurring. After that extraction and after seeing the X-ray, my keen interest to want to know more kept growing and I had issues with bleeding gums for the longest time. So when an opportunity to take a different direction after my "failed" Physiotherapy journey came, it was clear

to me that dentistry is where I want to go, to find solutions for my problems and to also be in a position where I'd be able to help other people with similar challenges in the future.

What is your job description as an Oral Hygienist?

My role as an Oral Hygienist is self-explanatory as English puts it, all about oral hygiene. We help people keep their oral cavities (mouths) to be always at optimum health and this is done through cleaning the mouth (scale and polish), advising on how to brush properly, how to prevent teeth decay and most importantly how to retain all their teeth in the mouth by doing right as advised, contrary to the normal belief that every tooth problem means the tooth has to come out (extracted).

How come you have a special interest in Oral Hygiene?

The mouth serves as an entry to all our body systems, so many things can go wrong in our health if our mouths or teeth are not in prime or optimum health. So if we take good care of this gateway into our body, we can manage to keep ourselves as healthy as possible, although not all health issues depend on the mouth. Another big and important issue is CONFIDENCE and PERSONAL OUTLOOK, if one's dental formula is in a bad state, it affects their confidence in front of people and makes them think and feel ugly, so if that is taken care of, everyone can face the world confidently. I want to be part and be the reason behind that smile and confidence.

How would your colleagues describe your work ethic?

A team player, a humble lifetime student always willing to learn and teach when I have to, a hard worker and a patient Hygienist in that I value rapport with patients as very important.

What do you think are two major ethical issues facing dentistry today?

Practitioners (in private practice) claiming for more than the work they did from medical aids. This can ruin one's business because clients will leave or report to the Council which might have dire consequences. Other Practitioners practise beyond the scope of practice due to acquired skills along the journey of dentistry.

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What do you feel are the most important qualities in being a good Oral Hygienist?

Passion for dentistry as an industry and the passion to teach because most of our job also involves a lot of dental public health where we've got to make awareness to current and prospective clients about preventative oral health as much as curative. The passion to work with people generally.

Describe the health education you provided that successfully improved a patient's oral health

In my first year of working in Limpopo; Mhlaletse, a patient came in a very bad oral hygiene state, when he came and I asked him what brought him there, he just simply said "Ke tlile ontsha lemeno (I'm here to extract the tooth), as every other patient would say when they have teeth issues. That tooth is the eleventh (upper incisor) which was chipped and in half and he said it was affecting his confidence so the better solution was to remove it and then replace it with a false denture. My advice to him was that we can still keep the tooth in the mouth and just make either a silver or gold inlay whilst we make it to be a full tooth again. We did that with my colleague and he was ecstatic when he received his inlay, he'd never thought it was possible.

What are the highlights of your Oral Hygiene career to date?

Seeing off many happy smiles from my treatment room warms my heart. I go home satisfied that I made a difference in someone's smile. Having been working under the supervision of my bosses (dentists, previous and current) I've grown and continue to grow a lot in the industry because there are some skills and ways of doing things they don't teach in varsity which we learn out here in the field.

What are the challenges you come across in your Oral Hygiene career?

The unavailability of posts from government hospitals or clinics remains a big thorn. We are left with no choice but to work with dentists where there's no job security because they can get liquidated any day. I say "no choice" because it's almost impossible to open my private practice as a new graduate. An internship from the government would come in very handy because perhaps we could be able to save from the decent earnings and start our own the following year. The limitation in our scope of practice is because there are certain basic dentistry elements which we should be covering and allowed to do as oral Hygienists. Hopefully, the Council will revise this in due course.

What challenges did you encounter during your studies at SMU?

The issue of reaching quota has always been a menace to almost all dental students across the board, over the years, and I was no exception. The problem it causes is that you end up focusing on quantity (the number of patients and points) than quality (the effective treatment given to the patient). The COVID-19 year was my final year, so a compacted academic year came with its challenges and problems, for the first time in 2020 I had Christmas on campus because of exams in late December and early January. I became a COVID-19 victim in January 2021 whilst still writing exams which resulted in me missing one exam but later writing it alone on a revised date.

Why you did specifically decide to study at SMU?

Firstly it was due to the influence of many people from my

community who were students back then while the institution was still Medunsa and also the University of Limpopo. The biggest driving points were my passion to work with people and also the job security that came with most courses offered by the institution.

As an alumnus of SMU, what do you miss about SMU?

I miss the love that roams around the institution. The brotherhood kept most of us sane and focused on the job at hand. One thing for sure about SMU, if anyone goes to bed hungry, it's on them, because there's no way no one can't offer you anything. There's pure love and it is indeed a home away from home.

Who do you consider as your role model?

Both my parents (mom and dad) plus my maternal granny who raised the man that I am today. I've always told myself that if I could half the people they're in terms of love and warmth, I'd be a better person for the society, a better Hygienist to my patients and a better father to my kids.

How do you stay up-to-date on current events in the dentistry and healthcare industries?

Always attending seminars, both online and physically to learn more from colleagues who have been in the industry longer than us, but also to learn new trends and about new products available.

How do you approach discussing unpleasant topics with patients and their families?

Firstly is to ease their worries because more often than not, the certain conditions they present with are due to having not known early enough where they could've prevented some things from progressing. Fully explain the pros and cons of certain treatments that require serious consideration, maybe to availability or non-availability of funds.

What advice can you share with our readers regarding your academic journey?

Stay focused on the prize ahead, go through your journey, and not that of your classmates. Finishing a course in record time is sweet and everyone's wish, but should your journey not go as you wish, don't give up or hate yourself for the prospect of not finishing with your peers, however, lift yourself to get your prize. It shouldn't matter when or how, just don't ever give up on finally getting that prize (the degree). The sweat, blood and tears are worth the pain, trust me.

Family: Are you married, do you have kids?

Not yet married. I have just one son thus far.

Hobbies: What are your hobbies?

- Watching lots of sports.
- Watching movies
- Fishing
- Reading

Social Media Handles

- Amukelani Appreciate
- @Amu_J
- @amuj88



SMU Convocation

President Linda Rojie congratulating the 2022 Graduates

I congratulate the 1435 graduates from the School of Science and Technology, the School of Health Care Sciences and The School of Pharmacy, the School of Oral Health Sciences and the School of Medicine on behalf of alumni and the convocation associations of this university. Congratulations on obtaining your Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU)'s qualification. SMU now has an estimated number of 8033 qualifications across the globe since its establishment. I deliberately articulate this figure to emphasize the exclusiveness of these qualifications. *'Asimang le mang'*.

You will be asked continuously where you obtained your qualification, do not be shy to respond and say it is an SMU qualification.

45 years ago this campus was built and no one could have imagined that this place would turn into a dream making factory, a theatre of endless possibilities. No one could have imagined the SMU we have today.

You will remember your very own experience when you got here. The SMU you are leaving as a graduate is far more different than the campus you first arrived at. It is evidently turning into a university we have long wished for.

SMU is an institution where a young lady leaves her home in the Eastern Cape with her suitcase, Passes her grandmother's house in Pimville, Soweto to replenish her 'padkos', and returns back to her home province as a healthcare professional, trained to serve her people.

SMU is an institution where a young man leaves his home in Bizana the Eastern Cape or Mashawana village in Limpopo, or

Bushbuckridge in Mpumalanga with a suitcase. And returns back to her home province as a healthcare professional, others return as uDokotela/Ngaka ready to serve our people.

All 1435 Students that graduated at this year's ceremonies, arrived here with different backgrounds and experiences. Throughout your studies you continued to face various challenges. But despite all the impediments, it is in this very theatre, where your dream of obtaining a qualification was turned into a reality.

I want to assure you that the many challenges that you faced are not reflected on your qualification, all of you leave SMU as equals on a clean slate ready to face new challenges.

Your graduation proves that the material fibre of your beings is made from some sort of greatness. You are great people, continue to be great and being Ambassadors of this great institution. Forever cherish SMU in your hearts. Remember to support SMU in every way you can, so that the institution can be ready to receive your own children and grandchildren one day.

I now charge you to return to the families and communities that have shared you with us. Serve our people with respect and dignity that they deserve.

I officially welcome you to the ranks of alumni and convocation. And it is my humble honour to welcome my own blood sister Gugulethu Retheo Rojie as an alumni of this university, which I hold so dear to my heart.



SMU Harambee Annual Fund Challenge

In the Spirit of Harambee, Ubuntu and Oneness, we pledge to pull together to raise a minimum of One Million Rands for SMU's needy students.



OUR MISSION

SMU is to deliver a high level cadre of health care professionals trained by experts from the Schools of Medicine, Pharmacy, Oral Health Sciences, Health Care Sciences and, Science and Technology.

We have a large number of brilliant students but lack sufficient resourcing to finance their various needs to fully experience a dignified university student life.

It is against this background that SMU has initiated the **SMU HARAMBEE ANNUAL FUND CHALLENGE** to raise funds to support our needy students.

THE NEED

Join our Vice Chancellor, Prof. Peter Mbatia and SMU in raising funds for a bursary program designed to assist academically qualified but financially disadvantaged students. Additionally, the initiative intends to donate to the university's Hands of Compassion food security project, which delivers meals to underprivileged students on campus.

THE CHALLENGE

Prof. Mbatia encourages students, staff, academics and alumni to participate in a structured giving program. We are called to make a minimum monthly contribution of R10 for students, R100 for staff, and R200 for alumni. In response, Prof has given a lead donation of R10,000 and invites SMU executives to donate as well.

Ways to give

1. Payroll donations
2. Online donations: <https://smu.devman.co.za/devman/online/giving/>
3. Pay Scan – Zapper
4. SMU banking details - Ref: Standard bank, Acc: 070754128, Branch code 020909, Q013 - Name Surname

Contact Details:

Mr Sbusiso Gwala: Institutional Advancement Officer | **Department:** Communication and Marketing
Unit: Institutional Advancement | **Email:** sbusiso.gwala@smu.ac.za | **Cell:** 073 069 0428

