

From the VC's Desk

Highlights | Thought Leadership

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NEWS



Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University to collaborate with Wenzhou Medical University, China

A renewed Strategic Intent to be a leader in Health Education and Health Services

Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University's renewed strategic intent to be a leader in health education, health services, research and innovation that contributes to the advancement of human health, is contingent on leveraging on partnerships, linkages and internationalization.

In support of this objective, coupled with a focus on expanding the University's global footprint, the Office of the Vice-Chancellor invited the People's Republic of China's South African Embassy representatives to visit the University in July 2022. The Chinese delegation to SMU was led by Mr. Long SHEN and the second Secretary for Science and Technology, Mr. Wei XIE. It was during these initial discussions that the highly ranked Wenzhou Medical University (WZU) was identified as the partner of choice for collaboration with SMU.



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SEFAKO MAKGATHO
HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

The initial engagements with WMU, which commenced in July 2022, led to the introduction of an Ophthalmology and Optometry Advanced training programme for staff and students. As part of this programme, that took place in October 2022, 15 experienced academics from both institutions had an opportunity to share their insights during the lectures, with over 30 South African clinicians having attended the programme.

The successful hosting of this specialist training programme highlighted the compatibility of the two institutions as dedicated health sciences universities, and the mutually beneficial skills and knowledge that could be shared between them. Against the backdrop of these initial engagements, on 10 May 2023 the President of WMU, Prof. Lyu Yijun and the SMU Vice Chancellor, Prof. Peter Mbatia signed an MoU to formalize collaboration between the two sister universities.

Whilst recognizing that this MoU sets out a broad framework on matters that both institutions intend to pursue and collaborate their efforts, the following are the main objectives of the MoU:

- To provide a broad framework within which the two institutions can develop and undertake collaborative projects in areas of common interests in, amongst others, research, teaching and learning or other mutually agreed initiatives.
- To promote cooperation in teaching, learning and research through an international exchange of students and staff.

In his address at the signing of the MoU, the WMU Chancellor, Prof. Lyu Yijun reflected on the initial engagements between the two institutions pointing to the fact that the success of the Ophthalmology and Optometry Advanced training programme was a good start to the collaboration, which led to the signing of the MoU. He further highlighted the following key aspects:

- The Wenzhou Medical University, jointly established by the Ministry of Education, the National Health Commission and Zhejiang Provincial Government, is one of the Priority Development Universities in the Zhejiang Province. In the past three years, the University has steadily developed and improved on the quality of its educational provision. Their nine disciplines have entered the top 1% of ESI global rankings. The University has also established

national key laboratories, National Engineering Research Center and several high-tech innovation platforms; recruiting high-level talents such as academicians, "outstanding youth", and Yangtze River scholars. WMU is among the top 100 universities in China in the Wushulian domestic University ranking, and ranks among the top 8 medical universities in the 2022 Shanghai Ranking Consultancy. With 5 affiliated hospitals, WMU enjoys abundant clinical resources, with the annual outpatient number exceeding 10 million.

- The signing of the MoU marks a new page of cooperation between WMU and SMU. Wenzhou Medical University will fully leverage our strength in medical education, research and healthcare to work closely with SMU and carry out multi-level collaboration in student and faculty exchange, joint research and publication, academic exchange and etc., setting an excellent example of China-South Africa collaboration in medicine and education as well as promoting the development of medicine in the two countries.

In his response, the SMU Vice Chancellor, Prof. Peter Mbatia expressed appreciation for the Wenzhou Medical University's willingness to enter into a partnership with SMU and further highlighted the following:

- The two countries are friendly allies who cooperate, economically, as part of BRICS. This cooperation also lends itself to opportunities for collaboration in other sectors, such as higher education.
- As the only purely health sciences university in Southern Africa, fit-for-purpose and mutually beneficial partnerships are important to SMU academically, but also for expanding our University's global footprint. In this context, this partnership between SMU and WMU will allow for knowledge and skills exchange, student and staff mobility, training of academics as well as executive management, collaborative research opportunities and virtual student and staff exchange.
- Being a niche university, research and innovation is extremely important for SMU which conducts research housed in various units: the Diarrhoeal Pathogens Research Unit, a designated World Health Organisation Regional Rotavirus Reference Laboratory and Collaborating Centre; the South



African Vaccination and Immunisation Centre; MeCRU Clinical Research Unit; the HPV and STIs Training Centre for Africa; the SMU Minimal Invasive Surgery Unit; the HIV-1 Resistance and Molecular Lab; the Electron Microscope Unit; the HIV and Hepatitis Research Unit, who recently added a new niche area in the field of genetic diversity of coronaviruses; and the Centre for Entrepreneurship Rapid Incubation.

Prof. Mbatlali concluded his remarks by stating that SMU views this partnership with WMU as a mutually beneficial collaboration which enables the sharing of knowledge between the two institutions, leveraging on each institution's strength.

In support of the signing of the MoU, Dr Prudence Makhura, Director: International Grants and Collaborative Initiatives at the National Research Foundation (NRF) stated that...

"The National Research Foundation (NRF) is in support of the MoU between Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University and the Wenzhou Medical University in China, especially, given the importance of China to South Africa, not only on a bilateral level but also as a member of BRICS. Health research is one of our strategic thematic research areas with our Chinese partners. We therefore, look forward to receiving research proposals between the two institutions when the SA-China Research Call (and the BRICS multilateral call) opens later in the year".



Pictures supplied by Wenzhou Medical University, China