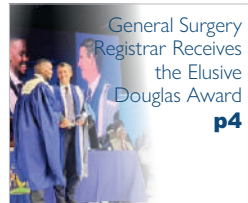
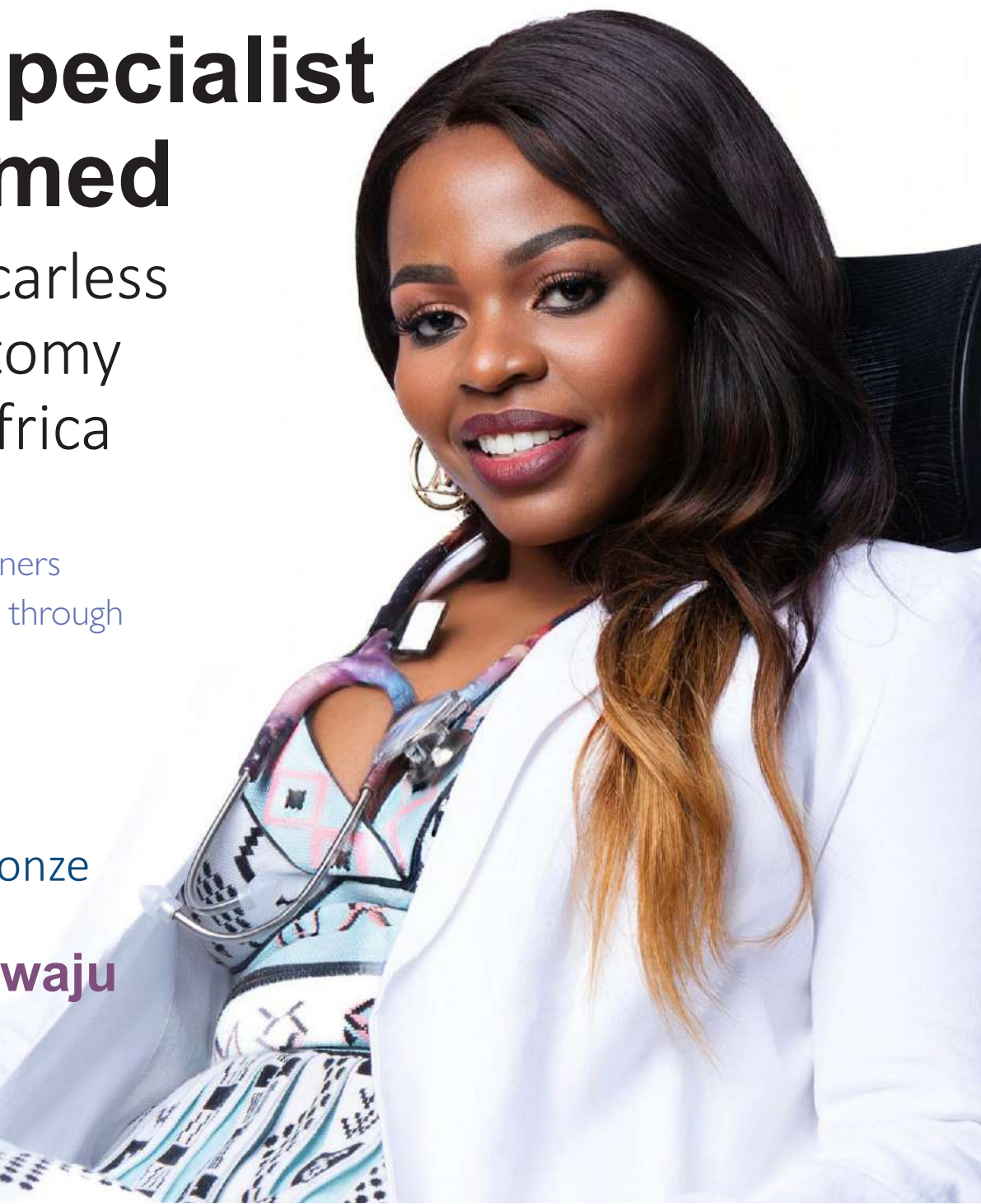


# SMU Specialist Performed the First Scarless Thyroidectomy in South Africa

SMU and CGE Partners  
to Raise Awareness through  
Gender Equality  
*Workshop*

Meet Merit Bronze  
Award Winner  
**Prof Olanrewaju  
Oladimeji**



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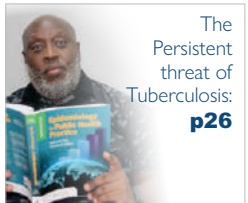
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# SMU Specialist Performed the First Scarless Thyroidectomy in South Africa

**S**pecialist General Surgeon and Acting Head of the Head and Neck Unit, Dr Winnie Mathe recently initiated and performed the first Trans-Oral Endoscopic Thyroidectomy Vestibular Approach (TOETVA) in South Africa. She performed it under the leadership of Professor Zack Koto, Chief Specialist and Head of the Department of Surgery at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) and Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital (DGMHAH).

TOETVA is a novel technique that allows the thyroid to be approached without visible scars, as it is performed through a natural orifice. This minimally invasive procedure offers patients a scarless neck and quicker recovery time. Traditional thyroidectomy can leave a noticeable scar on the neck, which some patients find undesirable. He emphasized that patient selection for TOETVA is crucial. "We select patients who are fit for anaesthesia and have small, single-lobe thyroid tumours," explains Dr Mathe.



SMU turns 10 on the 16 May 2024...

*Watch out for further  
announcements!*



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The selected patient was a female aged twenty-nine, suffering from solitary thyroid nodule TIRADS 3 Bethesda 3 with minimal blood loss of 100ml. Thyroid nodules are sporadic and are quite common in the female population and most are benign. The surgery is conducted when there is a suspicion of malignancy or definite malignancy diagnosed.

Dr Mathe indicated that the key motivation for TOETVA is the ability to offer patients scar less surgery, reduced pain, and quicker recovery period. Traditionally, a transverse cervical scar is made across the neck from one sternocleidomastoid muscle to the next. The skin, subcutaneous tissues and platysma are transacted, then craniocaudal flaps are raised and Jolls retractors are put in place. The strep muscles are divided in the midline and retracted laterally. The superior pole is ligated close to the gland to preserve the external branch of the recurrent laryngeal nerve as well as the parathyroid glands. Then the recurrent laryngeal nerve on the tracheoesophageal groove is identified and preserved. The inferior pole is ligated and dissected. The gland is then dissected off the trachea and ligament of the berry in the midline. Subsequently, the wound is then closed in layers.

As much as TOETVA offers numerous benefits it also presents technical hurdles. The surgery is performed in a confined space with vital structures and nerves nearby. "This necessitates significant expertise in laparoscopic surgery," says Dr Mathe. Furthermore, she indicated that there are hurdles to wider TOETVA adoption. "Large thyroid glands,

common in South Africa, and the required advanced laparoscopic skills are limitations," she remarks.

The team ensured informed consent by thoroughly explaining the procedure, potential benefits, and risks to the patient. This first TOETVA surgery in South Africa was a success. "The patient recovered well and was discharged the next day. There were no complications with the procedure," says Dr Mathe.

In his remarks, Prof. Koto indicated that he is confident about the future of TOETVA in South Africa. "We believe this procedure will gain traction, as amongst others, Dr Mathe will be presenting our experience at the upcoming endocrine congress in Cape Town," says Prof Koto. For surgeons considering TOETVA, he advised them to be careful about patient selection and advanced laparoscopic expertise. "Surgeons should be familiar with open thyroidectomy before attempting TOETVA," he emphasizes.

Koto concluded by highlighting the need for improved infrastructure at SMU. "Imagine what we could achieve with a proper academic hospital given that at SMU Surgery we are committed to pushing boundaries. Our next project is the liver transplant programme," he explained. His groundbreaking work with TOETVA opens a new chapter in thyroid surgery in South Africa, offering patients a minimally invasive option with significant cosmetic benefits.





# General Surgery Registrar Receives the Elusive Douglas Award Fellowship

**S**MU General Surgery Registrar Dr Nsizwenye Ntokozo Mkhwanazi has become the first African-black candidate in the history of the College of Medicine of South Africa (CMSA) to receive the coveted Douglas Award - Fellowship of College of Surgeons (FCS) medal. CMSA is dedicated to the promotion of the highest degree of skill and efficiency in medical and dental practice to cultivate the highest ethical standards and professional conduct. It also oversees the postgraduate specialisation of South African medical practitioners.

Dr Mkhwanazi shared his excitement indicating that winning the award is a great achievement. "I feel very humbled by it, but I think it reflects the environment and the training we receive at SMU Department of General Surgery under the leadership of Professor Zack Koto. I don't think this feat was possible anywhere else. It is for all of us and the long generation of Black surgeons who knew and heard and strove for this but could not achieve it for whatever reason. It is a tribute to Prof Koto, Prof Madiba and many more others who came before us," he shared delightfully.

Dr Mkhwanazi holds a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBChB) from the University of KwaZulu Natal, and certificates in Basic Surgical Skills (SMU), Advanced Trauma Life Support, FCS (SA) Primary, FCS (SA) Intermediate FCS (SA). He is currently registered for a Master of Medicine (Surgery) at SMU.

"I started studying quite early in my journey. Once the idea of doing Surgery was crystallized in my head, I just went for it and tried to fit in studying almost every day. It did not matter where I was and with whom. I took inspiration from my mentors and got obsessed with going over my work. I did most of my studying on my couch with my phone, so it sort of became a habit that I could not shake off even if I wanted to. My wife, Dr Lee Phala-Mkhwanazi enabled me in this and supported me in this journey," Dr Mkhwanazi remarks.

He believes that Surgery is an art which is delicate, high risk, and it stimulates the mind. He mentioned that during his rotation in the General Surgery ward at Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital (DGMAH), he was exposed to the ward rounds and morning meetings. That is when he realised that he wanted to be part of the intellectual enquiry and also extend to the clinical wards and theatre.

As a Registrar in the Department of Surgery, Mkhwanazi's responsibilities included evaluating and advising patients on the risk involved with having surgery and performing surgical procedures to prevent or correct injury, disease, deformities, and patient function while adhering to regulatory and ethical protocols amongst others. He is passionate about oncology because of his patients who get the short end of the stick when it comes to oncological services. He pointed out that colorectal cancer is one of the leading causes of cancer-related mortality in the world. The incidence is increasing in young patients and Africa is already way behind in

understanding this and responding appropriately. In addition, he indicated that we have the tools, and he is already on a journey to further his studies in colorectal surgery. He further stated that colorectal surgeons are uniquely positioned to provide an appropriate response.

“Minimally invasive colorectal surgery has become standard of care in many parts of the world and robotic surgery is our reality. My goal is to explore this and contribute to making it available and also a standard of care for our communities. Precision oncology is the future, and this is also something that I want to see benefiting our communities. Peritoneal surface malignancies, primary or metastatic are widely not understood and appropriately responded to. We need dedicated units for this specialised and difficult cohort of patients. I am currently training in colorectal Surgery at

Groote Schuur Hospital, and it is a great environment and an amazing unit to start a career in colorectal surgery,” Mkhwanazi explained.

In closing Mkhwanazi indicated that self-doubt is prevalent among scholars and a healthy dose of it, is a good thing to propel them forward. Furthermore, he mentioned that as a black person who knows that things have not always been easy, he always maintains the attitude of working harder than anyone else, and if he needs to be put in the hot academic judgment seat his work has to do the talking.” The FCS is the most challenging thing I have done in my life and the physical and mental labour that goes into it can sometimes feel impossible. It can only be cracked through daily efforts and support from family and mentors,” Mkhwanazi explains.



## SMU receives the British Academy Grant to develop writing capacity for South African Academics

**S**efako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) in conjunction with its international collaborators, has been awarded a Grant from the British Academy to fund a project called 'Strengthening South African Writing for Academic Outputs' from 27th March 2023 until 31st March 2025. Co-investigators of this project include Dr Moreoagae Randa, Senior Lecturer: in the Health Systems Management and Policy Unit at SMU, Department of Public Health, Professor Hester Klopper Deputy Vice-Chancellor: of Strategy, Global and Corporate Affairs at Stellenbosch University (SU), Professor Heike Bartel: German Studies and Health Humanities at the University of Nottingham (UoN), and Professor Julie McGarry: Nursing and Midwifery at the University of Sheffield (UoS). Focus on SMU



reporter interviewed Dr Randa to get insight about the British Academy Grant.

### **What motivated the British Academy to provide the 'collaborators' with this grant?**

The British Academy invited proposals for Writing Workshops from the least-developed countries. The criteria were that the Lead application should be based in the United Kingdom (UK) and the co-applicant be from a least developed country in this case, South Africa. Together with De Montfort University (DMU) as the Lead UK partner including UoN and UoS, and SA partners SMU and SU, we jointly applied and were awarded the grant in 2023.

### **Kindly explain what the 'Lead' referred to in the Collaboration Agreement is and its role**

The term "Lead" typically refers to the individual or organization that takes primary responsibility for overseeing and coordinating the project. In this case, the "Lead" refers to De Montfort University who is the UK lead applicant and has been awarded a Grant from the British Academy and will pass on funds allocated under which parties will collaborate on the work to be done on the project.

The Lead plays a crucial role in ensuring the successful execution of the collaborative research project by providing leadership, coordinating various aspects of the research project, including timelines, budgets, and resources; facilitating communication and collaboration among different project partners, ensuring effective exchange of information and updates; making key decisions related to the direction and implementation of the project in consultation with other project partners, and ensuring that the project progress is documented and reported to funding agencies or other relevant stakeholders.

### **Kindly indicate who the beneficiaries of this Grant are and how this will contribute to their academic journey or profession (strengthening their publications in what manner specifically)**

From the twenty-six public universities in South Africa, we have a representation from the University of Johannesburg (UJ), Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), University of Limpopo (UL), University of the Free State (UFS), Sefako Makgatho University (SMU) and Stellenbosch University (SU).

The project will significantly contribute to the academic journey and professional development of participants by strengthening their publications in several ways. Overall, the project's comprehensive approach to mentorship, networking, and skill-building will empower participants to strengthen their publications, advancing their academic careers and professional standing within their respective fields. By engaging with mentors and fellow participants, participants will have the chance to expand their professional networks, potentially leading to collaborations and co-authorship opportunities that can enhance the quality and reach of their publications.

Through this collaborative process, participants will have the opportunity to discuss challenges they encounter and collectively brainstorm solutions in a supportive environment where they can draw upon the expertise and insights of their peers and mentors, leading to more robust research proposals. Additionally, the provision of consistent support throughout the program will help participants refine their writing and research methodologies, leading to more impactful publications. Furthermore, the group dynamic will encourage the sharing of diverse perspectives and foster innovative thinking, enhancing the quality and feasibility of the proposed research projects.

### **Was there a criterion used to select the Grant's beneficiaries? Kindly explain.**

Applicants had to be registered in a South African University and be in the final stages of either a Master's or PhD program. An extension was also made to those within 10 years of completion of their defence. Our selection process sought to attract a broad spectrum of humanities and social science disciplines, encompassing varied academic and research experiences and backgrounds. Applications from diverse professional backgrounds such as geography, law, history, political science, education, sociology, linguistics, and related fields in healthcare education were welcome.

### **How did the collaboration between the five institutions come about?**

The collaboration between the five institutions originated through a combination of factors. The partnership was established in 2018 during my visit to UoN as a PhD student. The visit was supported by the British Council Newton Travel Grant as part of providing funding to early researchers in a partner country to visit an institution in the UK, to enhance and strengthen links for future research, and collaboration, build research capacity in developing economies and enhance the researcher's career opportunities. This collaboration is based on our common research interests, namely, gender-based violence that prompted discussions about potential collaboration opportunities.

Coming from the different institutions, our professional networks, conferences, and workshops facilitated our connection, leading to discussions about enhanced collaboration. Collaboratively, with UoN and DMU, we were awarded a grant from the Global Challenge Research Fund 2018/2019 where I was the SA Lead Partner.

### **What are the roles of the co-investigators since you are one of them?**

As co-investigators or mentors, we play integral roles in guiding, supporting, and mentoring candidates, contributing to the success and impact of their research projects. We offer guidance and advice by helping them navigate challenges, make decisions, and develop effective strategies to achieve project goals. We share our expertise with candidates by offering insights, recommendations, and best practices to enhance the quality and rigour of the research. We offer emotional support and encouragement to candidates, offer

feedback, and intervene when necessary to address issues or challenges. We also facilitate networking opportunities and collaborations with other researchers, professionals, and organizations in their field. Lastly, we provide oversight and accountability for the project, ensuring that it stays on track, meets milestones and deadlines, and adheres to ethical and regulatory standards.

### **How does this Grant and collaboration contribute to SMU's strategic objectives?**

This Grant and collaboration align closely with SMU's strategic priorities and goals, supporting the university's mission to advance knowledge, foster innovation, and contribute to the betterment of society through research excellence and collaboration. By engaging in collaborative research projects funded by this Grant, SMU demonstrates its commitment to research excellence and innovation, aligning with strategic objectives to enhance the university's research profile and impact. Participation in collaborative research funded by this grant promotes capacity building by providing opportunities for academics and researchers to develop their skills, expertise, and research capabilities. Knowledge transfer and impact will contribute to positive social, economic, and environmental outcomes. This aligns with SMU's strategic objective of enhancing its reputation and global presence as a research-intensive university.

### **Please share any additional information you deem necessary for the readers to know**

The collaboration has yielded superior results so far. Several Research Learning Objects (RLO), that is, free online resources with content on different Gender Based Violence topics, including information for facilitators and students on how to tackle cases related to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence have been published, as well as articles in peer-reviewed journals. Capacity building is central to this collaboration as collaborating with peers provides opportunities for skill deve-

lopment, knowledge exchange, and mentorship, contributing to the professional growth and development of the researchers involved. This collaborative research offers numerous benefits that enhance the quality, impact, and sustainability of research endeavours across our various disciplines and sectors.

### **What impact will this Grant make on your career growth and SMU's research throughput rate?**

This collaborative grant will have a profound impact on both my career growth and SMU's research throughput in several significant ways. I will have the opportunity to collaborate closely with esteemed colleagues from other institutions, enhancing my skills, knowledge, and expertise in my field (Public Health). This collaborative experience will contribute to my career growth by broadening my research perspectives and facilitating networking opportunities with experts in the field. Collaborating on this grant will allow me to establish and strengthen relationships with researchers and institutions both nationally and internationally. Successful participation in collaborative research funded by this grant will reflect positively on SMU, highlighting its commitment to research excellence, innovation, and collaboration. This will bolster the university's reputation as a leading research institution and attract further funding, partnerships, and talented researchers to SMU in the future.

### **Kindly indicate the names of the journals in which your research will be published**

We have already published articles and a book chapter in Spinger, Elsevier, Health SA Gesondheid, Curationis, Science Direct and registered with Prospero. On an annual basis, the SMU Research Directorate provides us with a list of accredited journals from the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), which is compiled from both national and international journals. As academics, if we publish in accredited journals selected from the DHET lists, we receive subsidy and recognition for the articles. Our choice for a Journal is based on scholarship and quality, that is high impact rating, peer-reviewed, a highly respected and learned journal in the field, and a high number of citations.

### **Which research project is earmarked for this grant? Kindly elaborate in detail**

As collaborators, we are not earmarking a research project from this grant. Our aim with the project is to empower our South African participants, Early Career Researchers (ECRs) with the knowledge and skills they need to engage in high-quality research and contribute to the academic and socio-economic development of their communities. We have paired the participants with mentors (collaborators) as we will be providing guidance and support throughout the research and writing process over the two years (2023-2025). Furthermore, we will be implementing mechanisms to assess participants' progress and the effectiveness of the project. This will involve having 6-8 weekly meetings and whenever a need arises to collect feedback from participants and track outcomes such as improved research skills and or successful grant applications.





# Dr Neha Kumar obtains International Award

**S**MU's Hepatopancreatic-Biliary Unit (HPB-Unit) sub-speciality fellow Dr Neha Kumar received the best mini-oral presentation award on the 3rd of February 2024 during the International Alpine Liver and Pancreatic Surgery (ALPS) Summit held in Italy. Dr Kumar was awarded for her outstanding presentation titled: Endoscopic Ultrasound (EUS) guided hepaticogastrostomy Procedure - Lessons Learned in a Tertiary Academic Centre.

Dr Kumar stated that, "The purpose of my presentation was to discuss how our unit set about performing this highly technical procedure to help our palliative patients. The discussion was around the technical tips we learned along the way to ensure the safety of the patients while providing a service that is often neglected in our setting. I also wanted to highlight how we managed to keep our hepaticogastrostomy procedure cost-effective, acknowledging our limited resources."

She further explained that a hepatobiliary fellow is an individual who has completed general surgery training and obtained the Fellowship of the College of Surgeons of South Africa: FCS (SA) qualification and is furthering their training by occupying an academic training post of a sub-specialist trainee in a specific area of the liver, pancreas and bile duct diseases and their surgical management. She indicated that the Summit targeted trainee HPB fellows/surgeons internationally, the with majority of attendees coming from American and European countries.

Dr Kumar explained that she was fortunate enough to receive direction to submit her abstract for this presentation from the Head of the Department: General Surgery Prof Zacharia Koto and the Head of the HPB-Unit Dr Imraan Sardiwalla. She indicated that Dr Sardiwalla previously attended this summit and found it highly informative when he was a trainee and advised her also to participate. She believes that the reason

her presentation was well received was because it was a practical discussion that showed real clinical benefits in a challenging setting.

"I feel humbled and encouraged to keep working hard and publishing the work that we do in our department as it is of an extremely high quality and deserves recognition. This is an international meeting and winning this award helps to put our department and the university on the map. The recognition is valuable for further work from our department, and it might also help with international collaborations. This recognition made me realize that no matter where you work or how difficult the circumstances can be, as a doctor/surgeon, it is important to keep the focus on the patients and improving their wellbeing," shared Dr Kumar.

Dr Kumar works in the HPB-Unit Unit at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University and Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital, Ga-Rankuwa. She is responsible for both the clinical and academic duties which include daily ward rounds, decision-making around the patient's clinical conditions, communication with senior consultants of the unit as to what is happening on the ground, performing the endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography (ERCP)/EUS procedures every Monday and Tuesday, participation in the theatre cases for the unit (elective and emergency) as well as outpatient duties. Academically, she is involved in ongoing research projects within the unit, performing independent research, presenting clinical cases and conditions at several academic meetings, teaching and evaluating the undergraduate students, teaching the post-graduate trainees, data collection in the HPB Unit's patient database, planning and preparation of the major oncological theatre cases, liaising with nursing and procurement departments of the hospital to ensure adequate and up to date equipment in theatre and endoscopy.

# Meet SAMRC Scientific Merit Bronze Award Winner Prof Olanrewaju Oladimeji



On the 7th of March 2024, SMU's Head of Doctoral Programmes in the Department of Public Health, Prof Olanrewaju Oladimeji received the South African Merit Research Council (SAMRC) Merit Bronze Award for his outstanding contributions to health research that goes with a certificate and monetary compensation of R10,000. Prof Oladimeji is a National Research Foundation (NRF) Y1-rated researcher for the period 2021 to 2026, a member of the South African Young Academy of Science (SAYAS), a Fellow of the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH), a member of the American College of Epidemiology (MACE) and the American Public Health Association (APHA). He is also one of the recipients of the 2022 Walter Sisulu University (WSU) Vice Chancellor Distinguished Award for NRF-Rated Researchers, the 2023 Mthatha Campus Productive Researcher (Senior Category-Publications) Recognition, and a nominee for the 2017 Human Sciences Research Council Senior Researchers' Award. Focus on SMU reporter talked to Prof Oladimeji about his achievement.

## **Congratulations on winning the Bronze -Award for outstanding scientific contribution to health research. How did you manage to win this award?**

I feel incredibly honoured, and winning this award was made possible through the recognition of my work by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Mashudu Davhana-Maselesele, and nomination by the Senior Director; Research Directorate, Prof. Thobeka Ncanywa, at my previous institution. Their belief in the significance of my contributions has been instrumental in achieving this remarkable feat, and I remain grateful for their encouragement and support in my research journey.

## **What is the purpose of this prestigious SAMRC award?**

The purpose of the prestigious SAMRC awards ceremony is to acknowledge and recognize individuals who have demonstrated exceptional scientific acumen and made innovative strides in addressing public health challenges, potentially influencing policy, and enhancing the well-being of the South African population.

## **What does this award mean to you?**

Winning this award for outstanding scientific contributions to health research in South Africa symbolizes recognition of the dedication, effort and passion for advancing health research in the country. This accolade reaffirms the value of my work and its impact on improving healthcare outcomes and addressing pressing health challenges. It also serves as a motivation to continue pushing the boundaries of scientific inquiry, striving for innovation, and making meaningful contributions to the well-being of individuals and communities. It is essential to mention that winning this award is not just a personal achievement; it is a testament to the collective efforts of my research

team, collaborators, students and mentors. This award inspires me to continue my pursuit of excellence in health research for the betterment of society.

**How would you use being the recipient of this award to influence others, and how do you think this will influence your career?**

Receiving this award is such a great honour, one that I intend to leverage to inspire and influence others positively. By sharing my journey and the significance of this recognition, I aim to motivate fellow researchers to pursue excellence in their endeavours, fostering a culture of innovation and impact in the scientific community. This accolade not only confirms my commitment to advancing health research but also opens doors for collaboration, funding opportunities, and broader recognition in my field. It will undoubtedly enhance my career trajectory, providing a platform to amplify my research, expand professional networks, and contribute meaningfully to addressing pressing health challenges.

**Tell us what you think may have distinguished you from other candidates.**

My demonstrated research leadership potential is evident in my ability to spearhead transformative research projects and mentor emerging scientists; my commitment to capacity development, nurturing the next generation researchers reflected in my supervision of Masters and PhD students; my track record of securing grant funding over the past five years showcases my ability to write grants and sustain research endeavours effectively and lastly, my active involvement in transformation efforts, through conducting research in under-resourced universities and participating in capacity development initiatives that align with the national research priorities and enhances the impact of my work.

**What is your greatest career accomplishment?**

My remarkable career accomplishment lies in a steadfast dedication to advancing clinical research capabilities and nurturing upcoming clinical researchers from Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs) in South Africa, with a proven track record of supervising and mentoring over 45 postgraduate students and contributing to more than 100 publications in the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) accredited journals with high citation index.

I co-coordinated the field implementation of the first-ever Tuberculosis (TB) prevalence survey in South Africa and led the pilot joint TB/HIV program in KwaZulu-Natal. I served as Principal Investigator of the Development and evaluation of a clinical prediction model for acute kidney injury in critically ill patients with or without TB-HIV co-infection in a rural tertiary teaching hospital in South Africa "AKITH-Study" SAMRC-WSU Research Capacity Development Initiative Grant Award. Furthermore, I also served as one of the principal investigators of the Khulani Siphile Siphuhle - Training Programme (KiSS-TP) funded by the National Institute of Health, D43 Fogarty HIV Research Training Program which offers intensive, mentored PhD training to Masters-level faculty and staff at selected Universities particularly in research focusing on HIV, TB, and mental health.

I am a faculty mentor for the Sustained Academic Research and Training Programme (SACERT). My role is to mentor and supervise doctoral-level scholars. Additionally, I am a Guest Editor for a special collection on Health Disparities in Scientific Reports and an Editorial Advisor to F1000 Gateway Global Public Health. I serve on the editorial boards of the Nature Scientific Reports, PLOS One, and Pan Africa Medical Journals. These engagements further emphasize my influence in shaping scientific discourse and dissemination.

**Which qualifications have you obtained to date?**

To this day, I am a proud holder of a Postdoctoral Fellowship in Global Health obtained from Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, USA (2020), a Doctor of Philosophy in Public Health obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, SA (2019), a Master's in Public Administration - Health Management obtained from the Ladoke Akintola University, Nigeria (2015), a Masters of Science in Epidemiology and Biostatistics obtained from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria (2012), and a Bachelor of Medicine; Bachelor of Surgery obtained from the University of Ibadan (2008).

**Tell us about a mentor who made an impact on you or set you on your present path.**

I am deeply grateful for the profound influence and guidance provided by my mentors, Prof Lovett Lawson, and Prof Luis Cuevas, who have sadly passed away. Their mentorship played a pivotal role in shaping my present path, and their legacy lives on through their impact on my career. They embraced me as their professional son, imparting invaluable wisdom and instilling in me a passion for excellence. During my Fogarty postdoctoral fellowship, I was fortunate to receive mentorship from Prof Ayuba Zoakah, Prof Charles Robert Horsburgh Jr, and Prof Robert Murphy. Their mentorship has been instrumental to my growth, providing invaluable guidance and support as I navigate my career. I am truly indebted to these great mentors for their unwavering belief in my potential.

**In conclusion, what message would you like to put across to individuals who want to also become prominent researchers?**

My advice to upcoming researchers is simple: Do what truly makes you happy. Be laser-focused when you explore ideas, ensuring your ideas are relevant to the research priorities of your district, province, or nation. Aim to address real-world problems with your research, using your findings to contribute meaningfully to solving contextual problems. Embrace creativity to draw strength from challenges and obstacles along the journey. Get at least a resourceful mentor who can guide you, support your career growth, and make you visible. Be passionate and curious. Collaboration is critical; work with others to make a difference. Always consider the potential positive impact your research can have on society, and approach it with enthusiasm and rigour. Build good social networks, as they can provide support and inspiration. While you work hard, remember to take time to unwind and care for your mental health and well-being. Balancing hard work with leisure moments is essential for sustained productivity and fulfilment.



# Postgraduate Students benefit from a Research Career Workshop

**S**efako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU)'s delegates from the Department of Computer Science and Information Technology (CSIT) attended a two-day Postgraduate Research Career workshop (PGRCW) recently held at the University of Pretoria (UP). The workshop was aimed at implementing a community outreach programme that directly benefits underprivileged postgraduate students.

It provided them with educational resources, training opportunities, and mentorship to empower and uplift marginalized communities through long-term positive change. "The workshop offered a comprehensive roadmap for aspiring computer science researchers, and fostered networking opportunities, encouraging connections between research and future projects," Dr Taurai Hungwe explains.

The first day of the workshop involved academic discussions keynote talks, and skills training on different research tools available for computing researchers. On day two, the industries that deal with research and development were invited. Attendees delved into various research areas, including Google ExplorerCSR mentorship, Digital forensics (DigiForS), System Specifications and Formal Methods (SSFM), Computational Intelligence (CIRG), and the research activities of VUT (ICT), TUT (ICT), and SMU (ICT).

The programme also explored the value of postgraduate degrees in the industry, featuring student and industry perspectives. Practical training sessions equipped participants with research tools like bibliography software, MathWorks tools, and High-Performance Computing (HPC) resources. Additionally, a session on Data Science for Social Impact (DSFSI) highlighted the potential of research to address societal challenges.



# SMU Observed World Oral Health Day

## at Thusong Primary School in the West Rand

In commemoration of the World Oral Health Day (WOHD), Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) Department of Community Dentistry with the Dental Therapy and Oral Hygiene students visited Thusong primary school in Kagiso (Mogale City Municipality), West Rand District on 19 March 2024. The theme for the WOHD 2024/2026 is 'A HAPPY MOUTH IS A HAPPY BODY'. The commemoration aimed to educate and empower learners and members of the surrounding communities with knowledge on how to prevent oral diseases and maintain good oral health.

This event was a collaboration of SMU, the Gauteng Department of Health (GDOH), the South African Dental Association (SADA), the Health Profession Council of South Africa (HPCSA), and the University of Witwatersrand. As part of the commemoration, SMU and Wits students encouraged learners and individuals from the surrounding areas to look after their oral health by adopting a good oral hygiene routine and managing risk factors. They also emphasized the importance of preserving oral health indicating that it can help keep the mind and body healthy too, as well as protect themselves against the spread of infections and resultant systemic diseases. Poor oral health has been linked to serious medical conditions such as pneumonia, bacteraemia infective

endocarditis, other cardiovascular diseases, respiratory diseases, and stroke and pregnancy complications like prematurity and low birth weight.

Kamogelo Thokoane, a third-year Bachelor of Oral Hygiene (BOH) student shared her gratitude about the event indicating that she had a lot of fun interacting with the Member of Executive Council (MEC) for Health, as well as sharing her knowledge with the learners." It was a memorable day, and I would like to get another opportunity like this in future," Kamogelo explains.



**Tips on how to improve oral health consistently were also highlighted during the commemoration:**

- It is important to take care of the mouth daily.
- Eat a healthy diet and limit sugary food and drinks.
- Avoid the use of tobacco and related products (including e-cigarettes).
- Brush your teeth at least twice a day for at least two minutes each time.
- Use a brush with medium or soft bristles and fluoride toothpaste. Remember to brush the tongue too.
- Clean between your teeth daily with floss, a water pik or other products made for that purpose.
- Replace your toothbrush every 3 to 4 months. Do it sooner if the bristles are worn or flare out.
- See a registered oral health practitioner (Dentist, Dental therapist, or Oral Hygienist) at least twice a year for check-ups and cleanings.



Although Oral Diseases, such as dental caries, periodontal (gum) diseases, and tooth loss are extremely common, communities need to be aware that oral diseases are preventable. A good oral hygiene routine does not only ensure a beautiful smile, and prevent unnecessary tooth loss, but it is good for your health in general.





# Professor Skaal vows to use her experience to influence positive changes in her domain

**P**rofessor Linda Skaal was recently appointed to serve as the head of the Social and Behavioural Unit (HSBU) in the SMU Public Health Department. Her responsibilities as HSBU include Research and Community Engagement; Development and facilitation of Advanced Social and behavioural Studies Modules; Supervision of Postgraduate students; both PhD and MPH, capacity building for junior staff; also, to assist with research capacity building for other departments in the School of Health Sciences.

"I started as a lecturer in the Physiotherapy department from 1996 – 2009 at the then Medunsa; then I moved to Public Health as Senior Lecturer from 2010 – 2013 (Medunsa Campus), then I moved to Turfloop Campus, University of Limpopo, Public Health Department as Associate Professor, and later, Full Professor. For me moving back to SMU was like coming back home. I left academia fairly young, and now I come back armed with advanced knowledge and skills, which I acquired in different platforms. I always knew that I would be back to plough back to my Alma Mata", Prof Skaal remarked.

Professor Skaal holds various qualifications at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. She completed her undergraduate degree: Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Physiotherapy at MEDUNSA in 1993, then proceeded to complete her Master of Public Health at Medunsa in 2004 and completed her Doctor of Public Health degree at the University of Limpopo in 2010. She also holds a certificate in Assessment and Moderation from Rhodes University, in 2012. Before joining SMU, Professor Skaal worked at the University

of Limpopo from 2014 to 2022. She occupied the following positions: head of department from 2014 – 2018; and the Acting Director for the School of Health Sciences from 2019 – 2021. After that, she went back to the Department of Public Health as a full professor of the department. She also served as Senate Representative at University Council from 2018 – 2022. She then moved to Durban University of Technology for a very short time (11 months), where she was a professor, tasked with establishing new Public Health Programmes for the institution.

Professor Skaal is currently a member of the Senate and School Research Committee. She was also a board member and deputy chairperson for the South African Medical Research Council (2016 – 2022); a Board Member for the South African Institute for Drug-free Sport (2012 – 2022); Executive Board of the Public Health Association of South Africa (2014 – 2017) and currently a member of KZN College of Emergency Care Council (2023 – 2026).

## **She previously received several Vice-Chancellor (VC) Research Excellence Awards (UL): As follows:**

- Best Established Researcher at the School level, VC Annual Research Awards (2017 and 2021)
- Best Overall Female Researcher: VC Annual Research Awards (2014 and 2017).
- Best overall Researcher with the largest external research funding, VC Annual Research Awards (2012 and 2014)
- Received best undergraduate research award (1993).

“I am not where I want to be, but I have paved my way towards achieving my ultimate goal of achieving Excellence in Implementation Research, which will be more impactful in communities. The Envisaged Center of Excellence aims to develop; and implement sustainable community intervention programs which will embrace innovation and entrepreneurship within communities to build sustainable behavioural change. I also see that SMU is the platform for me to achieve that”, Professor alluded.

Professor Skaal indicated that she appreciates the openness of the HOD and flexibility of the entire team, and their willingness to embrace any new positive ideas.” I will use my experience to influence positive change on the platform of research, administration, and teaching & learning. The first task is to assist students who have been in the programme longer than they are supposed to (pipeline students) so that they complete the Master of Public Health (MPH) and

graduate. I have already proposed that we run a series of Writing Retreats for those students who have collected data and those that are doing write-ups so that we provide physical technical assistance and ensure they complete their dissertations. I also brought the idea of us starting a Center of Excellence: Bio behavioural Studies, the department and the school have embraced the idea, so, I will be developing that Center, starting with the application right now “Professor Skaal stated.

“Students must acknowledge that the biggest life lessons emanate from personal failures, also, the greatness is measured by how many times you rise after falling. The word quitter must never reside on your doorstep. You never give up in your life and finish what you started, no matter how hard it is, human beings are built with resilience and drive and can reinvent themselves. Find a mentor to walk you through the journey of excellence “Professor Skaal advised.

# Prof Deliwe Phetlhu – Vice Chairperson of the South African Nursing Council

**N**ursing Science Head of the Department, Professor Deliwe Rene Phetlhu, was recently appointed by the Minister of Health Dr Joe Phaahla to serve as the council member of the 17th South African Nursing Council (SANC). Prof Phetlhu will serve as the Vice-Chairperson of SANC after fellow Council members voted her into that position for a five-year term of office. She is a visionary leader, a nurse clinician and educator with excellent strategic leadership skills, which include human capital management, financial management, research, and leadership skills development.



The objectives of SANC include and are not limited to promoting the health standards of the inhabitants of the Republic of South Africa; controlling and exercising authority concerning all matters affecting the education and training of all categories of nursing practitioners; advising the Minister of Health on any matter falling within the scope of the Nursing Act, 2005; place greater emphasis on professional practice, democracy, transparency, equity, accessibility, and community involvement. Focus on SMU reporter interviewed Prof Phetlhu to learn more about her role in SANC.

### **Which criteria were used to nominate you as a member and Vice-Chairperson of SANC?**

The South African Nursing Council (SANC) is a body that is legislated through the Nursing Act 33 of 2005 as amended and the Council's responsibility is to provide oversight to the organisation to ensure that it meets its mandate which is to protect the public through regulation of the nursing practice and education in South Africa. To be a member of the Council, one gets nominated by your peers in the profession based on your expertise, particularly in leadership, governance, understanding of the policy imperatives and Nursing education. The nomination is then submitted to the Minister through the Department of Health for evaluation, and he makes the appointment for one to be an ordinary member of the council. Subsequently, the chairperson and vice chairperson are nominated by the Council members and the chairperson's final appointment is ratified by the Minister while the vice chairperson is only endorsed by the chairperson after votes by the council members.

### **What are your responsibilities as the Vice-chairperson of the SANC?**

My responsibility is in line with that of the Chairperson where we work closely. In the absence of the Chairperson I am required to provide leadership. This role is predominantly to lead the Council on governance and implementation of the strategic plan, an oversight role that is mandated in the Nursing Act 33 of 2005. Hence, I am required to be part of the Executive Committee of the Council.

### **How will your appointment impact the Nursing offering at SMU?**

Being at the helm of nursing regulation in the country means

that one is in contact with experts in different nursing disciplines, law, economics, higher education, and other health professional bodies. This implies that lessons learnt will be implemented in the department of nursing, thus ensuring that the quality of nursing education offered is excellent. It also means that the department cannot act outside the legal framework as indicated in the Nursing Act, consequently ensuring that SMU is never fined or found to be on the wrong side of the law as I will be able to advise the higher authorities of the university when it comes to nursing issues. This adds value to the reputation of the university as a whole.

### **Given the platform as a Vice-chairperson, what are the key issues that affect the Nursing profession that you believe need to be addressed urgently?**

These include the improvement of the image of nursing through a change in the attitudes of practitioners, nursing leadership, and increase in the training of clinical nurse specialists in key disciplines (e.g. Midwifery, Mental Health Nursing, Critical Care Nursing, Nephrology) as the current shortage is not sustainable in pursuit of quality health care for all. Furthermore, systemic support to ensure that the nurses do their work with no hindrances, thus delivering the quality of care the communities deserve.

### **What does this appointment mean to your career growth?**

Well, having been in the profession for just over three decades in both clinical practice and nursing education and having worked with NGOs which work on health service delivery and policy, I think it is time to give back to the profession and the health sector. Nonetheless, I still believe that working in such a different environment comes with serious growth in leadership, governance and policy development. On the research front, the appointment comes with opportunities to ask questions that can lead to research for impact as one is at the cold front of seeing the gaps in the health care system, particularly, where nursing is concerned. The added advantage is the opportunity to collaborate with individuals from different non-health-related fields, in the African region and internationally to contribute to resolving health-related challenges.

### **In conclusion, which projects are earmarked for your term of office?**

We have just finalised our five-year strategic plan which is about creating a responsive South African Nursing Council in the era of technology. This means that upgrading ITC is going to be one of the biggest projects because ease of communication with the nurses and the community is essential to deliver on our mandate. Upskilling of nurses in the country through ensuring the implementation of CPD programmes, increase in the number of specialist nurses, and research as an evidence-based tools are other pieces that will bring us closer to achieving the SANC mandate. I believe that in our role as regulators, we also have the responsibility to guide and support nurses.



# Prof Patrick Lekgwara -

## The President-Elect for the Society of Neurosurgeons of South Africa

**H**ead of the Neurosurgery Department at SMU, Professor Patrick Lekgwara, was recently appointed to serve as the President-Elect for the Society of Neurosurgeons of South Africa (SNSA). Prof Lekgwara will act in this position of President-Elect for two years, then serve as President and Chairperson of the Society for another two years and then succeed as Past President for a further two years. The constitutional obligation allows him to automatically serve for six consecutive years. This line of succession is intended to promote long-term stability and continuity in the SNSA's leadership.

The SNSA was established to promote the practice of neurosurgery and interests allied to define the relationships relating to its mission which fosters optimal care for patients with neurosurgical disorders, through life, education, research, advocacy, and ethical practice. His vision as the President-Elect aligns with the objectives of SNSA.

His primary duties as President-Elect include to assist the President upon delegation by the latter and to prepare for ascendance to the Presidency. Upon delegation by the President, he shall be fully authorized to act as directed. He may serve as a liaison to other professional or learned societies on direction by the President. He shall also serve on the Executive Committee of SNSA.

“In the absence of the President or in the event of his inability to act, I shall perform the duties. While acting as President, I will have all the powers and be subject to all the restrictions. I will serve a term of two years and automatically accede to the Presidency of this Society at the last business session of the general meeting. If I assume the duties of a disabled President, he shall then accede and complete his term as President,” explains Prof Lekgwara.

He further explained that the objectives of the SNSA is to improve the quality of scientific knowledge and pursue lofty

standards of excellence in patient care, clinical practice, and related sciences among professionals in the field of neurosurgery. He said they maintain an educational organization dedicated to the exchange of ideas and dissemination of scientific facts in the field of neurosurgery. They provide instruction, scientific meetings, and professional publications for surgical, non-operative and diagnostic purposes in neurosurgery.

SNSA also seeks to improve communication and provide support for Neurosurgeons and clinicians and to help improve their work; investigate and promulgate concepts and methods by which neurosurgical conditions may be detected and treated; maintain the highest ethical standards for the organization and full communication and interaction with other recognized bodies and speciality associations; strive for acceptable and equitable practise conditions and remuneration for those practising in neurosurgery, amongst others,” indicated Lekgwara, who is also the Chairperson of Post-graduate Examination Committee of the School of Medicine at SMU.

### He served SNSA for the past twenty years in the following positions:

- President-Elect, from 2023 to date.
- Secretary, from 2018 to 2023.
- Treasurer, from 2012 to 2018.
- Member of the World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies (WFNS) Congress Organizing Committee 2023.
- Member of the 21st Biennial Congress Organizing Committee 2009-2010.
- Secretary of 18th Biennial Congress Organizing Committee 2003-2004.

In conclusion Prof Lekgwara stated that according to the HPCSA register, South Africa has more than 300 qualified neurosurgeons, and lauds SMU for being the nerve centre of producing more Black neurosurgeons.



## A voice for all International Students at SMU: SMUIISO re-affirms their commitment

The Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences International Student Organisation's (SMUIISO) Constitution states that the Organisation will not only be a voice for all international students on campus but will also 'seek to ensure better recognition of all International Students in order to foster recognition of the contribution of all International Students, to SMU in their role, to establish relationship for the betterment of the main student body as well as reinforcing the vision, strategic plan and value system as well as the codes of conduct of the university.

The new SMUIISO Executive was recently inducted by Mr Themba Khumalo, Deputy Director of Student Affairs; Dr Carlien Jooste, Director Internationalisation and Ms Eunice Modiba, Administrative Officer in the Diversity and Advocacy Unit. At the induction, members of the previous SMUIISO Exco offered their advice and also presented the financial statements for the previous year. The outgoing president, Abe Ayomide, commented that the Exco should realize the importance of what they were elected for and “be at the forefront and be willing to do more than what your portfolio requires.”

Mr Khumalo, during his very informative presentation on collaborative leadership, echoed the outgoing president's sentiments in stating that “each and every one of you on this

Exco must collaborate and make sure that you know why you want to be here”.

The new Exco and Director of Internationalisation, Dr Carlien Jooste, also discussed at length how important it is to bring the local to the global, and the global to the local. She stated that “it is important that we work together to create spaces where local and international debates, discussions and cultural sharing can take place. It is only in these spaces where the true impact of internationalisation will be felt, Jooste concluded.”

### The new members of SMUIISO Exco for 2024 are:

- **President:** Mr Kevin Nkafo Kaffo (from Cameroon, MBCHB 3)
- **Deputy President:** Mr Phillip Matemera (from Zimbabwe, MBCHB 5)
- **Treasurer:** Mr Samuel Olajide (from Nigeria, BSc Mathematics ECP 3)
- **Secretary:** Miss Leto Mkhonta (from Eswatini, MBCHB 6)
- **Project Coordinator:** Miss Vanessa Odoom (from Ghana, BSc Physical Sciences ECP 3)
- **Student Liaison Officer:** Miss Priscilla Odoom (from Ghana, BSc Mathematical Sciences ECP 3).



# SMU and CGE Partners to Raise Awareness through Gender Equality Workshop

**S**efako Makgatho Health Sciences University's (SMU) Gender Based Violence (GBV) Unit in partnership with the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) hosted a two-day Gender and Development Awareness Raising Workshop (GDARW) held from 28-29 February 2024. The workshop was aimed at equipping students, committee members, and staff with the knowledge and tools to navigate gender in a complex world. Participants actively engaged in discussions, presentations, and activities, fostering critical reflection and dialogue.

Koketso Sekhu, Education Officer from the CGE indicated that the workshop served as a platform for integrating development and gender equality, ensuring that the issues of gender equality are promoted whilst helping students understand the constitution and the CGE Act and the promotion of inclusivity within the university.

### The following topics were discussed:

- Understanding gender, Exploring concepts of gender identity, gender roles, and the social construction of gender.
- Gender in healthcare: Examining gender disparities in healthcare and academia.
- Gender and development awareness.
- Universal Human rights and domestic legal frameworks

to mainstream gender.

- Gender-Based Violence: Addressing the prevalence and impact of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and intimate partner violence, and strategies for prevention and response.
- Gender-Responsive Practices: Introducing practical approaches and tools for integrating gender perspectives into research, teaching, and institutional policies and practices were explored during the workshop.

Sibusiso Skosana a Bachelor of Science in Life Sciences student shared his experience about the workshop and stated that “I have learned that there are diverse types of genders and how people conform to them is different. The pronouns that we see on social media were explained in the workshop and it needs you to understand that you cannot be narrow-minded, you have to be open-minded to gender confirmations,” Sibusiso shared.

This collaborative effort between SMU and CGE signifies a commitment to fostering a more equitable environment for all. By equipping its members with the knowledge and skills to challenge gender norms, SMU is taking a vital step towards a more inclusive future.





# Meet the SMU Institutional Advancement Officer - **Mr Legodi Mashiane**

Mr Legodi Mashiane was recently appointed as an Institutional Advancement Officer (IAO) for Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU). His professional background centres around roles in investment banking, capital markets and business development within the financial services sector. With experience in investments and financial markets, partnership cultivation and fundraising, he has contributed to initiatives that supported the development of various government institutions. Now, as the IAO for SMU, he looks forward to applying his experience to further the university's strategic objectives. Focus on SMU reporter interviewed Mr Mashiane to get insight into his new role.

#### **In detail, what does your role as an IAO entail?**

My role as an IAO is multifaceted. I am responsible for fostering relationships with private-sector companies, foundations, alumni, donors, government institutions and other stakeholders to advance the university's strategic objectives. This involves fundraising, sponsorships, alumni engagement, communications, and promoting the university's brand.

#### **Can you briefly walk us through your professional journey leading to this role?**

My career journey has predominantly revolved around positions in investment banking, capital markets, and business development within the financial services sector. Throughout my tenure, I have honed skills in investment management, partnership cultivation and fundraising, leveraging these capabilities to advance initiatives aimed at bolstering the growth of diverse government institutions. Transitioning into the role of Institutional Advancement Officer at SMU, I am eager to harness my accumulated experience to propel the university towards its overarching mission and strategic objectives.

#### **In your role as an IAO, how will you help SMU to meet its strategic goals?**

I will contribute to SMU's strategic goals by developing and implementing fundraising campaigns, engaging with alumni, foundations, and private-sector companies, to foster a culture of philanthropy, enhancing the university's visibility and reputation, and forging strategic partnerships to support key initiatives.

### **What do you expect to accomplish in your first 90 days?**

In my first 90 days, I aim to conduct a comprehensive assessment of SMU's current advancement efforts, establish key priorities for fundraising and alumni engagements, initiate relationships with key stakeholders, and develop an initial fundraising strategy aligned with the university's strategic objectives.

### **In setting and prioritizing fundraising goals, which projects urgently need cash injection?**

Projects requiring urgent funding may include scholarships for students in need, basic food, and accommodation for students in need, research initiatives, infrastructure development, and programmes to enhance teaching and learning resources.

### **Which potential partners for co-fundraising or campaigns have you identified?**

I have identified potential partners such as corporate sponsors, philanthropic foundations, government agencies and alumni networks, which share SMU's vision and values.

### **Which role would you wish the SMU stakeholders to play during the fundraising initiatives?**

I would like SMU stakeholders to actively participate in fundraising initiatives by providing financial support, volunteering their time and expertise, advocating for the university, and serving as ambassadors to engage others in philanthropy.

### **Describe how you would implement a giving programme and motivate donors to start giving to it.**

I would implement a giving programme by clearly articulating the impact of giving support, creating compelling fundraising appeals, leveraging storytelling to showcase success stories, recognizing donors-contributions, and offering various giving opportunities tailored to donors-interests and preferences.

### **What are the top three characteristics that summarize you as an incumbent of IAO?**

The top three characteristics that summarize me as an IAO are a strategic thinker, relationship-builder, and results-oriented professional.

### **What are your short and long-term goals?**

My short-term goal is to establish a strong foundation for advancement efforts at SMU and achieve measurable progress towards fundraising targets. In the long term, I aim to help enhance SMU's reputation within the private sector, secure significant support, and contribute to the university's sustainable growth.

### **How do you define success in your role as an IAO?**

I define success as achieving fundraising goals, increasing alumni engagement and philanthropic support, enhancing the university's reputation and visibility, and positively

impacting the lives of students, academics, and the broader Institution at large.

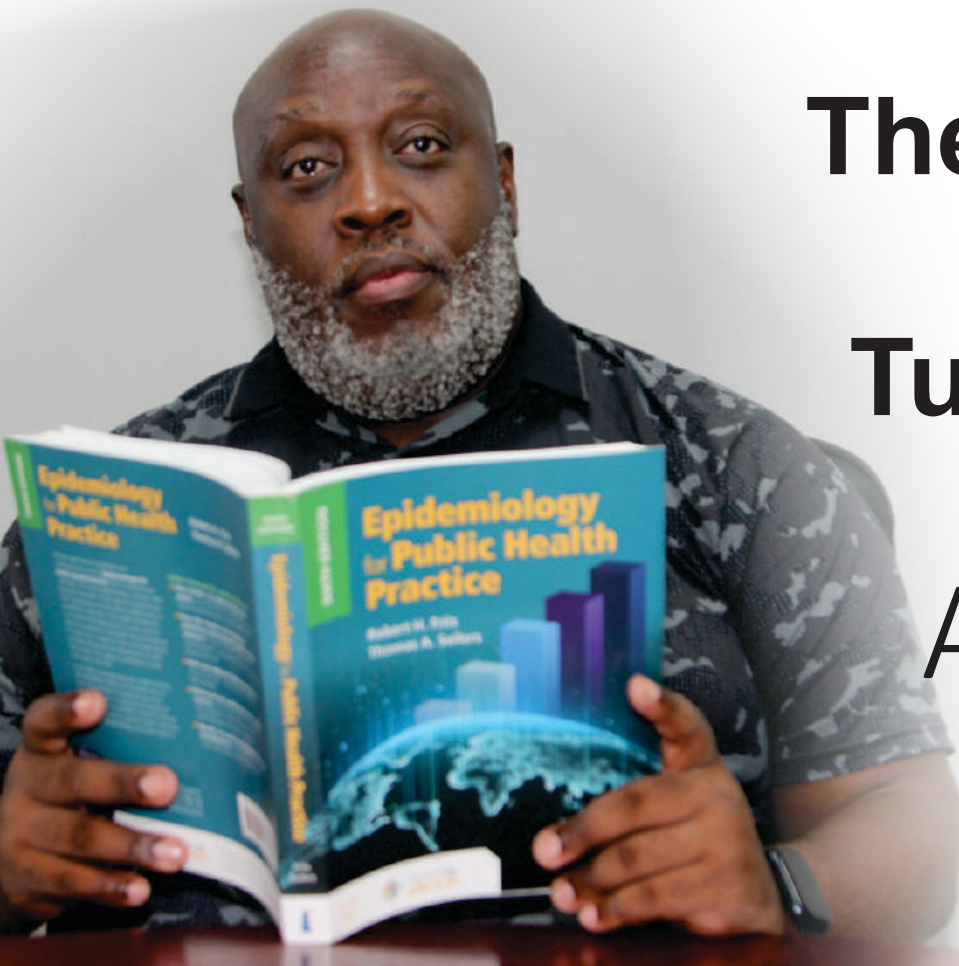
### **The SMU brand is complex and is always compared or confused with its predecessors, as an IAO how would you convince potential donors to contribute?**

To convince potential donors to contribute, I would emphasize SMU's unique strengths, achievements, and impact, differentiate it from its predecessors, and demonstrate how their support can make a tangible difference in advancing the university's mission and addressing critical needs.

### **In conclusion, what message can you share with SMU stakeholders?**

I am deeply committed to advancing SMU's mission of excellence in health sciences education, research, and community engagement. I am excited about the opportunity to collaborate with stakeholders and make a meaningful difference in the lives of students and the broader institution.





# The Persistent threat of Tuberculosis: A Call for Awareness

**T**uberculosis (TB) is a global health menace that continues to afflict communities worldwide. Despite being preventable and curable, TB remains a prevalent cause of illness and death. The persistence of this disease underscores the urgent need for heightened awareness and understanding.

TB is an infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. While it primarily targets the lungs, it can inflict harm on other parts of the body. The disease spreads with ease when active TB carriers cough, sneeze, or converse, making TB a significant public health concern.

Regrettably, the fight against TB is impeded by a widespread lack of awareness about the disease. Many people are unaware of their TB status due to symptom overlap with other diseases, such as persistent cough, fever, and weight loss. This lack of awareness often results in delayed treatment, leading to further disease spread and a higher risk of complications.

Raising awareness about TB is therefore paramount in combating its spread and ensuring timely treatment. Public health campaigns, educational programs, community outreach initiatives, and public service announcements can be effective methods of disseminating critical information about TB. These efforts should focus on educating the public about the symptoms of TB, the importance of early detection, and the necessity of adhering to the treatment regimen.

Healthcare professionals, as frontline workers in the fight against TB, must also be adequately informed. They need to be trained to recognize TB symptoms, provide accurate diagnoses, and administer appropriate treatment. This is especially vital in resource-limited settings.

However, the fight against TB extends beyond the medical realm—it's a social battle too. The stigma associated with TB often deters individuals from seeking treatment due to fear of ostracization. It's crucial to dispel this stigma by educating the public that TB is a disease like any other and not something to be ashamed of.

In conclusion, raising TB awareness is a pivotal component of any comprehensive strategy to eradicate this disease. By educating the general public and healthcare professionals, we can facilitate early detection, ensure appropriate treatment, and prevent the further spread of this deadly disease. The fight against TB is a collective responsibility that we all must shoulder in our quest to eliminate TB from our communities.

**Disclaimer:**

*The views expressed are those of the author.*

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# Reflections on the Human Rights Conference: implications for SMU

**In his keynote address on Monday, 18 March 2024, at the National Human Rights Conference, President Cyril Ramaphosa stated that: “The adoption of our Constitution with its Bill of Rights by the Constitutional Assembly on the 8th of May 1996 was a great moment in our struggle to achieve a free and equal society. As I said at the time, it marked the day our country and our people came of age. I referred to our Constitution as the birth certificate of our nation.”**

**T**he three-day conference was hosted by the Minister of Justice and Correctional Services, Mr Ronald Lamola, reflecting on the state of human rights in South Africa as the nation celebrates 30 years of democracy. Over 1,000 delegates, including the Premier of the Gauteng Province, Mr Panyaza Lesufi, the Commissioner of African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR); Chairperson on the United Nations Commission on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; United Nations High Commissioner, and the Chief Justice of the Republic of South Africa, were in attendance.

Historically, Human Rights Day in South Africa is linked to 21 March 1960, and the events of Sharpeville, where 69 people died and 180 were wounded when police fired on a peaceful crowd that had gathered in protest against the pass laws.

The President stated that South Africa had come a long way to rectify the ills of apartheid since 1994, foregrounding legislation put in place to promote human rights. These included, amongst others, the Promotion of Access to Information Act, the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act, the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, the Employment Equity Act and the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act. He further stated that:

“Before the advent of democracy, our country was a pariah state that was infamous for violating the basic rights of the majority of its citizens. We lived in a country where racial discrimination was at the core of government policy. Today, our country is revered as a country that upholds, protects and advances the basic human rights of the people who live in South Africa,”

**Whilst acknowledging the gains that have been made, he acknowledged that:**

“We continue to be plagued by poor service delivery, especially in

our municipalities. Corruption deprives citizens of the fulfilment of their rights. Whilst we are rightfully proud of how far our constitutional, rights-based order has come, we know that much still has to be done to fulfil the promise of the full enjoyment of the basic human rights of all our people.

**Subsequent to the president's address, the discussions centred around the following topics:**

- Assessment of Progress towards building a culture and respect for human rights in South Africa: 30 years post-apartheid;
- The right to land ownership and progress in land restitution;
- The role of the Judiciary in the promotional and protection of human rights.
- Socio economic rights;
- Access to housing, water and sanitation as safeguards for human dignity and enjoyment;
- Access to health and social security as intervention tools to fight poverty and improve living conditions,
- The right to education as a tool for progress,
- Economic and Social Upliftment and Wellbeing,
- Human rights as a pillar of south Africa's foreign policy;
- International human rights law and the right of self - determination of the people of Palestine and Western Sahara.

As SMU Senior Director, Ms. Ramsingh observed, overall there was a pervading concern around the promotion and protection of human rights, and a strident call that these must be protected as the cornerstone of South Africa's democracy. She further intimated that “it is important for SMU staff to attend and participate in such national conversations to ensure that we keep abreast of the environmental changes and how they impact on SMU's policies and practices”.

# Institutional

# Values

Aligned to Strategic Plan 2021-2025

## Accountability:

We are obliged to answer for the execution of our responsibilities. Accountability cannot be delegated, whereas responsibility can be

1. delegated without abdicating accountability.

## Effective Leadership

We are results-driven and focus on achieving strategic objectives and positive outcomes.

2.

## Efficiency

We pledge to be efficient stewards of the resources entrusted to our care for maximum benefit to the University.

3.

## Excellence

Performance excellence in the core and operational functions of the university.

4.

## Integrity

We act with integrity in accordance with the highest academic, professional, and ethical standards.

5.

## Respect

We respect and honour the dignity of each person, embrace civil discourse, and foster a diverse, inclusive, and safe community.

6.

## Student Centered

Promoting student-centeredness as the heart of the academic enterprise.

7.

## Ubuntu

encompasses respect, dignity, value, acceptance, sharing, co-responsibility, humanness, social justice, fairness, personhood, morality, group solidarity, compassion, conciliation etc.

8.

The University is a values-driven institution. Our people adopt and live on values and shapes our culture lived by the alignment of the objectives of all stakeholders. Our institutional values guide our behaviors and actions every day.

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