

ON SMU  
**FOCUS**

SMU's Official Staff Publication  
First Quarter 2025

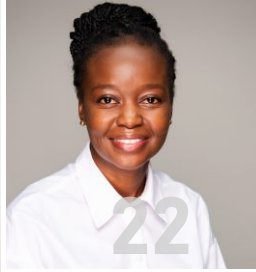


**CRÈME DE LA CRÈME  
OF SMU**

**Honouring Excellence. Inspiring the Future.**

They lead. They innovate. They inspire. SMU's finest minds are driving change, shaping the next generation, and setting new benchmarks in academia, administration, and beyond. This is a celebration of brilliance—of those who make SMU exceptional.

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# Editor's NOTE

## Honouring Excellence. Inspiring the Future: Celebrating SMU's Crème de la Crème

Welcome to the inaugural issue of SMU's Official Staff Publication for the First Quarter (Q1) 2025—Crème de la Crème of SMU: Honouring Excellence. Inspiring the Future. In these pages, we celebrate the exceptional calibre of SMU's academic and support teams, recognising those who lead with distinction, innovate beyond conventional boundaries, and inspire not only their colleagues but also the next generation of leaders.

At SMU, excellence is not an abstract ideal but a daily commitment. Our institution has long been a fertile ground for ingenuity, and the talent within our walls is the lifeblood that drives transformational change. This publication is a tribute to our finest minds—those whose brilliance continues to set new benchmarks in academia, administration, research, and community engagement. It is a celebration of the collective spirit that propels SMU forward, reinforcing our reputation as a guiding star of progress and innovation in an ever-evolving global landscape.

In this issue, you will encounter stories that exemplify the very essence of what makes SMU exceptional. From groundbreaking research that addresses pressing global challenges to the tireless dedication of support staff ensuring our students receive world-class guidance, each feature underscores our shared commitment to excellence. Our articles explore the journeys of individuals who, through perseverance and a passion for their craft, are not only reshaping their disciplines but also setting inspiring examples for future leaders.

The narrative of our institution is one of bold ambition and relentless pursuit of quality. Whether it is through academic rigour or the nurturing of a supportive environment, every initiative at SMU is

geared towards realising our potential as a catalyst for positive change. We are proud to highlight the achievements of those who demonstrate that leadership is as much about personal endeavour as it is about uplifting the entire community. Their contributions remind us that every breakthrough, every innovative idea, and every act of mentorship is a building block for a brighter future.

As you peruse the pages of this edition, I invite you to reflect on the power of collaboration and the transformative impact of sharing expertise. At SMU, we believe that the most significant strides are made when we stand together, drawing on our diverse strengths to overcome challenges and celebrate victories. Our commitment to supporting one another—across faculties, departments, and roles—ensures that the standards of excellence we uphold today will inspire the innovators of tomorrow.

This issue is more than a compilation of news and stories; it is a call to action for every member of the SMU community. Let us continue to lead with integrity, foster creativity, and embrace the spirit of innovation that defines us. In doing so, we not only honour our storied past but also pave the way for future generations to carry the torch of excellence. Together, we are SMU—exceptional, enduring, and ever inspiring.

Welcome to the celebration of brilliance. Welcome to the Crème de la Crème of SMU.

**Tshimangadzo Mphaphuli**  
Editor



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# SMU: A powerhouse redefining global health and science

- By Tshimangadzo Mphaphuli



**A**t the heart of modern innovation, Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) stands as an example of transformative education, visionary leadership, and groundbreaking research. With an unwavering commitment to excellence, SMU has carved out a distinguished reputation as a centre of academic excellence with societal impact that not only serves local communities but also reverberates across global health and science landscapes.

SMU's journey is defined by its relentless pursuit of knowledge and the ambition to impact lives. This journey began with a clear vision: to develop a curriculum that fosters critical thinking, ethical practice, and pioneering research. Today, SMU's robust academic programmes and state-of-the-art research, teaching, and learning facilities are nurturing a generation of leaders who are redefining what is possible in the realms of health sciences and beyond. Academics and support staff collaborate seamlessly, driving initiatives that have already led to significant breakthroughs in public health, biomedical innovation, and sustainable healthcare solutions.

“From campus innovation to global impact—SMU sets the gold standard for excellence.”

A key pillar of SMU's success lies in its dynamic leadership. University administrators, academic mentors, and support teams work in harmony to create an ecosystem where excellence is not just an aspiration but an everyday reality. This collaboration is exemplified by success stories from alumni and current students whose experiences at SMU have shaped their careers and propelled them onto the world stage. From pioneering emergency medicine practises to leading global health projects, SMU graduates carry the institution's ethos of service and innovation wherever they go.

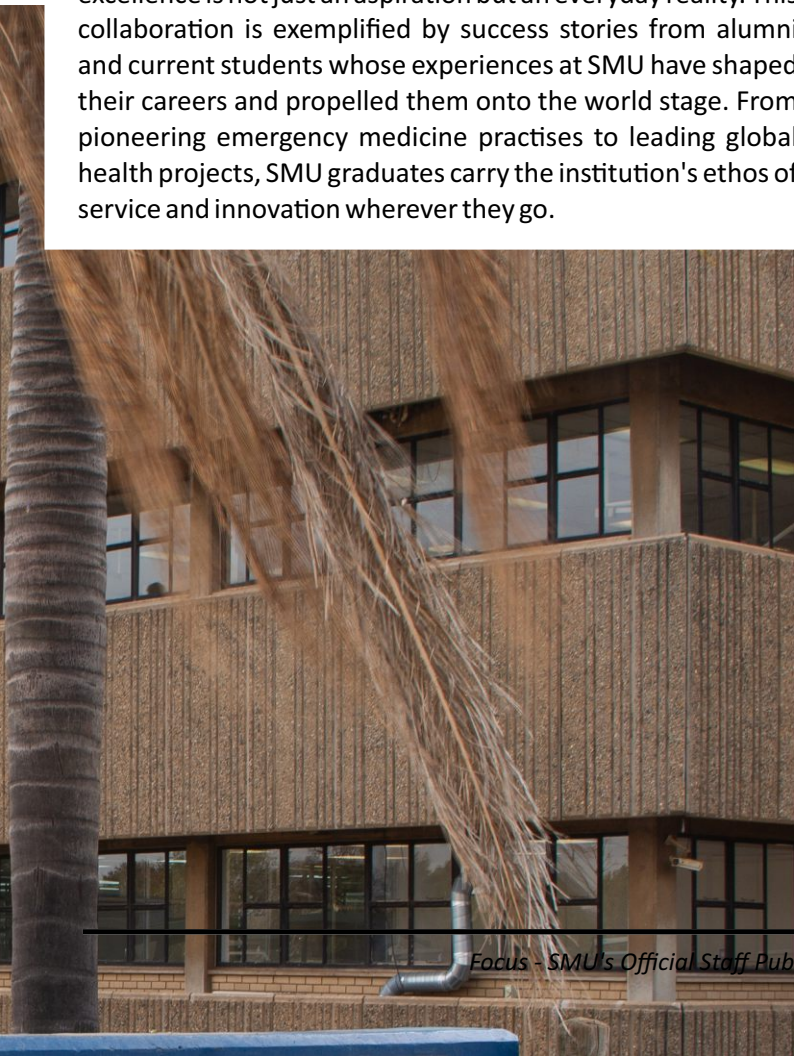
Integral to SMU's global impact are the strategic partnerships forged with leading institutions and industry players worldwide. These alliances enhance research opportunities, facilitate cross-border academic exchanges, and open up new avenues for collaborative projects. Through these connections, SMU has positioned itself as a nexus of ideas and innovation—where local talent meets global expertise. By engaging with international partners, the university not only enriches its academic offerings but also ensures that its research addresses the most pressing challenges of our time, from pandemic preparedness to sustainable healthcare delivery.

Equally important is SMU's commitment to creating an inclusive learning environment that champions diversity and fosters a spirit of community. The university's programmes are designed to be accessible and transformative, ensuring that students from all backgrounds have the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from its world-class education. This inclusive approach has yielded a vibrant campus culture, one that values intellectual rigour alongside compassion, creativity, and resilience.

In the words of one distinguished alumna, “SMU instils the confidence to challenge convention and the courage to innovate.” Such testimonials underscore the profound impact that SMU has on shaping careers and, more importantly, on shaping the future of healthcare and science globally. Every lecture, every research project, and every community initiative is a building block in a larger vision—a vision that sees SMU not only as an educational institution but also as a catalyst for meaningful change.

As we look towards the future, SMU continues to push the boundaries of what is possible. With ambitious research projects in the pipeline, innovative teaching methods, and a commitment to fostering the next generation of leaders, SMU remains at the forefront of academic excellence. Its story is one of passion, perseverance, and profound impact—a story that inspires us all to aim higher and dream bigger.

In celebrating SMU's journey, we are reminded that excellence is not static—it is an evolving force that drives progress and transforms lives. SMU is proof that when talent, vision, and dedication converge, the results are nothing short of extraordinary.



# Pandemic pioneer and distinguished scholar reshaping community health

- By Dimakatso Modise

**P**rofessor Hannelie Meyer was recognised as the Best-Established Researcher and Best Overall Female Researcher at the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Awards 2024 for her outstanding contributions to public health pharmacy research. She received this prestigious recognition for her dedication to impactful research, mentorship, and leadership in research. "I am deeply honoured by this recognition," she says. "It is evidence that dedication and collaboration drive impactful research in public health pharmacy."

Her journey in academia and research bears testimony to her unwavering commitment to improving public health through evidence-based interventions. As a Full Professor in the Department of Public Health Pharmacy and Management (PHPM) in the School of Pharmacy, she also leads the South African Vaccination and Immunisation Centre (SAVIC) at SMU. With over 40 years of experience in the pharmaceutical and public health sectors, she has made significant contributions to improving primary healthcare at the national, regional, and global levels.



Meyer's research focuses on strengthening healthcare services and improving public health, with a particular emphasis on vaccination as a vital pillar of antimicrobial stewardship. This includes building vaccine confidence and promoting the rational use of medicines to ensure patient safety. A National Research Foundation (NRF) Category C2 rated scientist since 2022, she has an impressive body of work, including 184 articles in peer-reviewed journals, 406 national and international conference presentations, and 57 research and academic awards, including several SMU Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Awards, namely the Distinguished Community Scholar Excellence Award in 2021; Most Established Researcher in the School of Pharmacy Excellence Award in 2018 and 2022; and Best Overall Female Researcher Excellence Award in 2018. Her mentorship has led to the successful completion of 96 postgraduate students, including 7 PhDs.

Her academic leadership has seen her coordinate the Bachelor of Pharmacy (BPharm) programme for nine years, lead the development of the professional Master of Pharmacy (MPharm) in PHPM, and develop training materials for the Higher Certificate in Vaccinology. Her work supports the World Health Organization's (WHO) goal of ensuring global access to safe, effective, and high-quality medical products, vaccines, and technologies.

Throughout her career, Meyer has benefited from strong mentorship, which she now pays forward to young and emerging researchers. I was fortunate to have had great mentors, such as Professor Rose Burnett, who introduced me to research on the social aspects of vaccination, and Professor Brian Godman, who helped expand my expertise in drug utilisation research," she explains. "Now, I strive to provide the same support and guidance to early-career researchers."

She encourages early-career researchers to seek mentorship, engage in academic collaborations, and take advantage of funding opportunities provided by SMU and external bodies. "Commitment, dedication, hard work and a passion for meaningful research are key to long-term success," she advises.

Balancing academic excellence with personal responsibilities remains a challenge for many female researchers. Meyer acknowledges the difficulties of securing research

funding, managing administrative tasks, and maintaining a work-life balance. "Women in research face unique challenges, but with resilience and support, we can excel in both our professional and personal lives," she says. Despite these challenges, she has carved a path of success, demonstrating that women can excel in academia and research while fulfilling personal and family roles.

Beyond academia, Meyer's work has helped shape national, regional and global health policies. She holds three ministerial appointments in South Africa, including chairing the National Immunisation Safety Expert Committee and serving on the National Advisory Group on Immunisation and the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority Board. She also serves on various African Union vaccine safety committees and the WHO Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety.

Her dedication to community engagement was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. She played crucial roles in developing training materials, training healthcare workers, designing vaccine implementation guidelines, and establishing vaccine safety surveillance systems. During the pandemic, it was crucial to ensure that healthcare workers were well-equipped with the knowledge and resources to manage the implementation and safety of the COVID-19 vaccine, she recalls. Her leadership in vaccine risk communication and pharmacovigilance has significantly contributed to strengthening South Africa's primary healthcare service delivery.

Meyer considers her most significant achievement to be the success of her postgraduate students. "Seeing my students thrive and take on leadership roles is incredibly rewarding," she reflects. Many of her mentees now hold leadership positions in government and academia, driving positive change in public health and pharmacy. She believes in the power of mentorship, collaboration, and dedication to fostering a new generation of healthcare professionals who will continue her legacy.

Her philosophy is encapsulated in the African proverb: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." Through her research, mentorship, and leadership, Meyer has undoubtedly made significant strides, and her contributions will undoubtedly resonate for years to come.



**A visionary force in Public Health Pharmacy, Meyer's groundbreaking research and dedicated mentorship are setting a new benchmark for excellence and innovation on a global scale.**

# Integrating education with social responsibility to drive meaningful change

- By Tumelo Moila



**S**efako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) has long been a cornerstone of social and economic development, fostering impactful relationships with communities to drive socio-economic progress. Through its commitment to community-based teaching, learning, and research, SMU ensures that students graduate as engaged citizens ready to address real-world challenges. The university's reciprocal approach to community engagement benefits both students and the broader society, reinforcing its mission to integrate academic excellence with social impact.

Demonstrating this commitment, SMU has recognised Emma Musekene with the prestigious Best Community Engagement Award at the 2024 Vice-Chancellor Excellence Awards. This accolade acknowledges her dedication to bridging the gap between dental education and underserved communities, particularly her work with pensioners at Korwe Multi-Purpose Centre in Ga-Rankuwa.

Under Musekene's leadership, Bachelor of Dental Therapy and Bachelor of Oral Hygiene

students refine their clinical skills while providing essential oral healthcare services. Approximately 200 pensioners benefit from free oral health screenings, personalised hygiene advice, and demonstrations on proper brushing and flossing techniques. The initiative promotes oral health equity and instils a lifelong commitment to community engagement among future dental professionals.

A seasoned oral hygiene Lecturer, Musekene holds multiple qualifications, including a Bachelor of Oral Hygiene, a Bachelor of Administration, an Honours in Developmental Studies, a Postgraduate Diploma in Public Health, and a Master's in Public Health. She is currently pursuing a PhD. Her career shift from a Community Development Officer at the Assistant Director level to oral healthcare was driven by the realisation that oral health is a critical yet often neglected aspect of overall well-being.

“With this award, we celebrate the lives we have touched, the smiles we have restored, and the trust we have built with communities,” says Musekene. “It reaffirms our dedication to making oral healthcare accessible and reminds me why I chose this path—to serve, educate, and uplift those often overlooked.”

Beyond clinical work, Musekene leads multiple outreach initiatives, including mobile dental clinics and school programmes, ensuring vulnerable populations receive essential oral healthcare. “Many people suffer in silence, unaware their pain is preventable,” she says. “Our goal is to bring hope and dignity to those neglected by the healthcare system.”

A defining feature of these outreach efforts is their holistic approach to oral healthcare. “We don't just conduct screenings; we ensure patients receive referrals within the School of Dentistry for continued care,” she explains. “Our work is not just about treatment—it's about empowerment, education, and restoring confidence.”

The impact of these initiatives aligns with SMU's broader mission of integrating education with social responsibility. “We measure success not just through statistics but through

transformation—the trust we build and the lives we change,” Musekene emphasised.

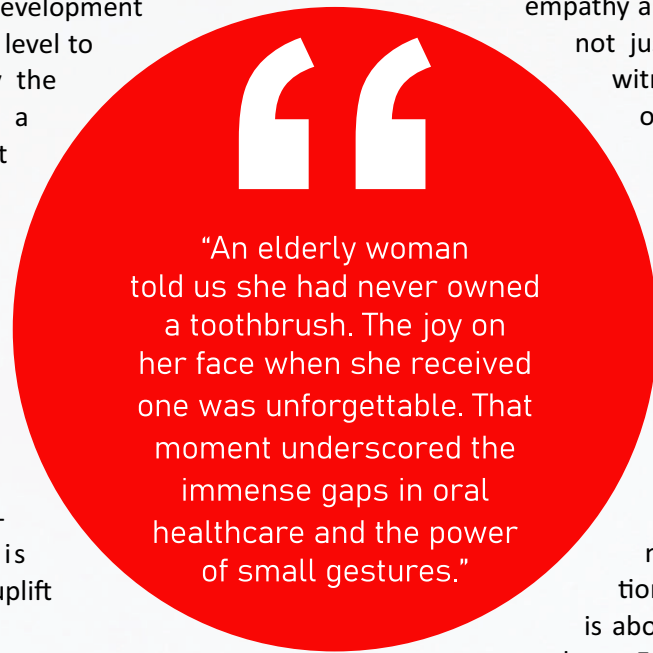
One particularly moving experience reinforced the importance of her work. “An elderly woman told us she had never owned a toothbrush. The joy on her face when she received one was unforgettable. That moment underscored the immense gaps in oral healthcare and the power of small gestures.”

Musekene's initiatives also provide students with invaluable hands-on learning experiences, immersing them in real-world challenges while fostering empathy and compassion. “Our students do not just learn—they experience. They witness firsthand the human impact of their future profession. Faculty members guide them, ensuring they refine their skills while developing a deep commitment to service.”

She strongly advocates for embedding community engagement within academic programmes, urging institutions to see it not just as an academic requirement but as a moral responsibility. “True education extends beyond the classroom. It is about using our knowledge to uplift others. Every institution should integrate community engagement to produce professionals who serve with both knowledge and heart.”

Receiving the Best Community Engagement Award marks a milestone, but for Musekene, it is just the beginning. “This award is for the communities we serve, my students, and the faculty members who guide them,” she reflects. “It reminds us that what we do matters and fuels my dream of a world where preventable oral health issues no longer go unnoticed.”

Her motto, “Your Smile, Our Concern,” encapsulates her unwavering commitment to transforming lives—one smile at a time. As SMU deepens its dedication to community engagement, its impact will resonate for generations, shaping a future where knowledge, compassion, and social responsibility drive meaningful change.





# Pushing Pharmaceutical Sciences Boundaries: Mentoring the next generation

- By Tumelo Moila

**S**efako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) continues to solidify its reputation as a leader in health sciences research, with its NRF-rated researchers playing a crucial role in shaping the institution's academic landscape. Among them is Dr Bwalya Angel Witika, a Senior Lecturer and NRF-rated researcher in Pharmaceutical Sciences, whose work in nanomedicine and drug delivery systems is making significant strides.

Witika, a Pharmacist by profession, has an extensive background in drug design, development, and delivery. With over 47 ISI-accredited publications, three book chapters, and an editorial role, his contributions to the field of pharmaceutical sciences are substantial. "My research focuses on developing advanced drug delivery systems, nanomedicines, and functional biomaterials for treating infectious, hereditary, and lifestyle diseases," he explains.

His interest in pharmaceutical research was sparked by the urgent need for innovative healthcare solutions in Africa. Coming from an academic family, with his father a professor of chemical and mining engineering, he was introduced to the importance of scientific research at an early age. This exposure, coupled with his fascination with molecular medicine, led him to specialise in nanomedicine and drug delivery.

Witika's research journey began at Rhodes University, where he earned his Master's and PhD in Pharmaceutics. "One of my biggest challenges was navigating resource limitations and securing collaborations," he recalls. However, strategic networking and perseverance helped him overcome these hurdles.

Since joining SMU in 2021, Witika has been at the forefront of pioneering nanomedicine research at the university. "The leadership at SMU has been instrumental in my success, providing access to cutting-edge research equipment and fostering a collaborative environment," he says. His contributions have not gone unnoticed—he recently received the Best Emerging Researcher Award and a prestigious NRF Y2 rating.

Witika's award-winning research centres on innovative drug delivery systems, including nano drug design and

functional biomaterials. One of his most notable achievements is the development of SMU's first-ever product patent aimed at improving breast cancer and osteoporosis treatment. "Our research enhances treatment efficacy while minimising side effects, ensuring better patient compliance," he explains.

Beyond academia, Witika's work is geared towards real-world application. "Our technologies are designed to be affordable and adaptable, particularly for underserved communities," he notes. Although his research has yet to be translated into practical healthcare solutions, it is progressing towards implementation, with support from industry partners.

Witika's research is highly collaborative, involving partnerships with institutions across five countries. "I have secured grants with collaborators from Northern Ireland, France, and Brazil while maintaining strong ties with local universities," he says. His work in interdisciplinary research, particularly in nanomedicines and biomaterials, benefits from collaborations with chemists, biologists, and engineers.

Looking ahead, he envisions his research evolving towards personalised medicine and artificial intelligence-driven drug delivery. "I recently secured funding to collaborate with a world-leading researcher in microneedle technology in Northern Ireland, which will open new research avenues," he reveals. His team is also embarking on an ambitious project for HIV prevention in women, which could revolutionise long-term, cost-effective prevention

methods.

For aspiring researchers, Witika emphasises the importance of persistence and collaboration. "Building a strong network of mentors and maintaining adaptability are key to success," he advises. He also highlights the role of funding in advancing research and calls for greater institutional support for emerging researchers.

As SMU continues to drive excellence in health sciences research, Witika's work illustrates the university's commitment to innovation. "I am dedicated to pushing the boundaries of pharmaceutical sciences and mentoring the next generation of researchers," he concludes.

“The leadership at SMU has been instrumental in my success, providing access to cutting-edge research equipment and fostering a collaborative environment.”

# SMU academic sparks global medical revolution

- By Tumelo Moila

**S**efako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) is leading advancements in medical research and innovation, identifying globally significant themes with societal impact. Central to this mission is Professor Anna Oettlé, a Full Professor in the Anatomy and Histology Department, whose exceptional contributions to anatomical research have earned her a prestigious accolade at the Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Awards 2024.

Oettlé qualified as a medical doctor at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1988 before pursuing an MSc in Anatomy with distinction. Transitioning into academia in 2002, she developed a keen interest in anatomical variations, which ultimately earned her an NRF C2 rating. "Clinical practice revealed the significance of anatomical variations in diagnosis and treatment. Modern 3D imaging techniques enhance visualisation, yet the principle of using multiple views remains essential," she explains.

Oettlé's research has evolved from traditional anatomical studies to advanced 3D imaging techniques. A landmark achievement in 2009 saw her collaborate with the South African Nuclear Energy Corporation (Necsa) to conduct the first cone beam tomography scans on human remains, revolutionising 3D anatomical analysis.

Her research spans bone and dental variation, craniofacial morphology, hominin evolution, and forensic applications. Notably, her work in biological profiling methods aids forensic scientists in identifying unknown victims, significantly contributing to criminal investigations.

## The significance of an NRF Rating

An NRF rating validates a researcher's contributions, enhances visibility, and unlocks funding opportunities. "Applicants must present five publications over eight years. A C2 rating confirms that all reviewers recognise the researcher as established, with impactful contributions and international collaborations," she notes.



"SMU provides expert consultants to review applications and offer constructive feedback. Since joining in 2017, this environment has been instrumental in increasing my research productivity."



At SMU, institutional support has been invaluable. "SMU provides expert consultants to review applications and offer constructive feedback. Since joining in 2017, this environment has been instrumental in increasing my research productivity."

Among her most cited studies is one that established an age classification system from sternal rib ends for South

Africans, widely used in forensic profiling. "This study has been cited 143 times, assisting biological profiling. Similarly, our research on the mandible's micro structure has crucial applications in orthodontics and forensic science," she says.

Her research directly benefits medical practice, enabling clinicians to assess cephalopelvic disproportion during childbirth and inform dental procedures. It also equips forensic scientists with localised standards for facial reconstruction in missing persons cases.

Oettlé champions mentorship and interdisciplinary collaboration. "Engineers have helped refine 3D measurement techniques. Cross-disciplinary work fosters innovation. I mentor early-career researchers, believing in their potential and encouraging impactful work."

She emphasises the role of NRF ratings in strengthening SMU's research reputation. "These ratings drive early-career researchers to focus and secure funding. Increased funding facilitates mobility and international collaboration."

Looking ahead, she aims to expand 3D scanning applications and enhance biological profiling methods. "3D imaging is becoming more accessible. My goal is to secure funding for advanced equipment and foster interdisciplinary collaborations."

Reflecting on her VC Excellence Award recognition, she states: "It is an honour and a motivator to continue publishing. Previous awards funded research assistants to archive skeletal remains. I plan to use this funding to archive our scan collection at SMU's central archives for future research."

Encouraging aspiring researchers, she advises: "Dream big, work hard, and embrace new ideas. Stay positive and seek collaboration. Almost anything is possible with dedication."

As SMU continues to drive medical research and innovation, its commitment to fostering excellence and collaboration ensures a lasting impact on healthcare. Through dedicated researchers like Oettlé, SMU is shaping the future of medical science, making transformative contributions to global healthcare.

# Outstanding leadership fuels multi-million grant success

- By Tumelo Moila

**S**efako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) is a university rooted in academic excellence, student welfare, and institutional growth, with exceptional leadership and professionalism at its core. Recently, Theo Bhengu, a key figure in the Grants Office, received the Outstanding Leadership and Professionalism Award at the Vice-Chancellor Excellence Awards, recognising his commitment to SMU's development. His leadership has played a transformative role in the university's progress.

In 2017, Bhengu was recruited by the then Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Dr Engela van Staden, to apply his financial expertise at SMU. His leadership drives enhancements in financial operations, paving the way for the creation of the Grants Department, which began with a dedicated single member.

Today, the department has grown into a formidable team, securing millions in grant funding and supporting SMU's academic and research growth. "I am deeply honoured to receive this award and share it with my team," Bhengu says, highlighting the collaborative nature of his success. His department plays a crucial role in supporting students, faculty development, and SMU's academic reputation.

Bhengu's leadership is defined by collaboration, transparency, and strategic thinking. He promotes teamwork through open communication, shared goals, and professional development, ensuring that grants align with institutional priorities for long-term success.



Bhengu's recognition underscores the crucial role of support staff in advancing the university's mission and cultivating a culture of professionalism.

A key achievement under his leadership was securing R312 million for projects under the Sibusiso Bengu Development Programme. Despite stringent compliance requirements, Bhengu's strategic planning and teamwork led to a successful application. "This achievement reinforced the importance of collaboration and a proactive approach to leadership," he reflects.

His client-centric approach ensures stakeholders receive timely support and clear guidance on funding opportunities. While his team does not engage directly with students, their work supports student success by securing funding for academic and research projects. His commitment to efficiency and transparency has set a high standard for service delivery at SMU.

Bhengu's willingness to support colleagues and departments further distinguishes his leadership. A notable example was in 2024 when the School of Science & Technology faced a funding shortfall for a Work Integrated

Learning Summit. His team provided R350,000, ensuring the event's success.

As higher education evolves, Bhengu has embraced digital tools to enhance grant management efficiency, allowing real-time tracking of funding trends and compliance. However, he acknowledges the challenges of managing grant compliance and external financial constraints. "By staying ahead of funding trends and fostering relationships with funders, we can efficiently manage these challenges and drive successful out-comes for SMU," he notes.

Leadership and professionalism at SMU extend beyond individual achievements, shaping a culture that prioritises student well-being, academic excellence, and research innovation. Bhengu's recognition underscores the crucial role of support staff in advancing the university's mission and cultivating a culture of professionalism.

As SMU continues to evolve, strong leadership remains essential to its success. Graduates nurtured in this environment emerge as ethical, compassionate, and innovative professionals who uphold the university's values. Leaders like Bhengu set a benchmark for future generations, reinforcing SMU's commitment to producing socially responsible professionals who make a meaningful impact on society.





# “Botho ba motho ba mo direla”

- By Dimakatso Modise

**S** As the recipient of the Support Employees Award for Exemplary Client-Centric Behaviour at the 2024 Vice-Chancellor's Awards, Elisa Segaille, Administrative Officer in the General Surgery Department at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), embodies the institution's values of compassion, excellence, and teamwork. In this interview, Elisa shares her insights on delivering exceptional client service, her personal values, and her journey at SMU.

Segaile's commitment to client-centric behaviour is evident in her approach to her role. "I believe in being true to myself and being an open book to clients," she says. Every person is unique and carries a special essence within them; it all depends on how you present yourself. Her dedication to providing excellent service has earned her recognition, and she humbly acknowledges the impact of her work on students, colleagues, and visitors.

"I'm passionate about delivering exceptional service because I believe it makes a difference in people's lives," Segaile explains. "When clients feel valued and supported, they're more likely to succeed and reach their full potential."

In her role, Segaile is responsible for providing administrative support to the General Surgery Department, which includes coordinating exams, managing student records, and ensuring the smooth operation of the department. Her exceptional organisational skills, attention to detail, and ability to work well under pressure have made her an invaluable asset to the team.

"Teamwork is essential in delivering exceptional client service," she emphasises. A team should be comprised of individuals who are there for one another and always ensure that they are each other's strength. Her collaborative approach has fostered a positive work environment, and her colleagues appreciate her willingness to support and learn from them.

"I've learned that nothing is ever difficult if you have a listening heart," she says. "It takes the ear to hear, but the heart decides how to receive the news and attitude of the difficult client."

One of Segaile's greatest strengths is her ability to connect with people from diverse backgrounds. Her warm and welcoming demeanor puts everyone at ease, and her willingness to listen and understand their needs

has earned her a reputation as a compassionate and empathetic administrator.

"My mom always told me, 'Botho ba motho ba mo direla,' which means 'your kindness and humility will work for you,'" she shares. "I believe in living by these words and treating everyone with kindness and respect."

Segaile's personal values of compassion, humility, and kindness guide her interactions with clients and colleagues. She believes in continuous growth and development, seeking opportunities to improve her communication skills and expand her knowledge. Her commitment to her faith and her desire to make a positive impact at SMU drive her to excel in her role.

"Never take for granted the role you are in," she asserts. "Always remember that you also play an important role. Smile, warm your heart, and seek growth and prosperity."

One notable example of Segaile's exceptional client service is her work with a student who was struggling to attend classes. She took the initiative to mentor the student, providing guidance and support that helped him overcome his challenges and eventually graduate as a medical intern. This testament to

her compassion and dedication has inspired her colleagues and reinforced the importance of client-centric behaviour in higher education.

"I'm grateful for the opportunity to make a difference in people's lives," she says. "I believe that's what makes my job so rewarding."

Segaile's story is a testament to the power of compassion, teamwork, and dedication to excellence. As SMU continues to strive for excellence in teaching, research, and community engagement, her commitment to client-centric behaviour serves as a beacon of inspiration for staff and students alike.

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“I'm grateful for the opportunity to make a difference in people's lives. I believe that's what makes my job so rewarding.”



# Green glory: Horticulturist galvanises a campus transformation

- By Dimakatso Modise

**M**pho Mmako, a distinguished horticulturist at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), is a prime example of what it means to embody the values of excellence, commitment, and teamwork.

Recently honoured with the Support Employees Award for Collaboration and Teamwork, as well as Best Support Employee, Mmako has made a remarkable impact in his role, proving that hard work, passion, and dedication never go unnoticed.

His journey at SMU is one of devotion to creating an environment that not only serves the university's academic community but also nurtures it. "I'm deeply honoured to receive these two awards; this is evidence of my efforts on behalf of Grounds Maintenance colleagues," says Mmako, reflecting on his recognition. For him, these accolades are a direct reflection of his commitment to the university and the importance of teamwork in his field.

As a horticulturist at SMU, Mmako has earned the affectionate title of "Garden Boy," a nod to his deep connection with the natural world. He takes responsibility for the management of the university's grounds, working tirelessly to ensure that students and staff can enjoy a conducive environment for learning and personal well-being. "I always strive to create landscape spaces that will contribute to the personal well-being of students & staff," he shares.

A driving force behind Mmako's success is his passion for positive change. He finds great inspiration in transforming the university's grounds, with feedback from long-time staff members inspiring him to nurture the beauty and vibrancy that define SMU's landscape. One of his greatest joys is working with students in the university's vegetable garden, where he can witness first-hand how the produce positively affects their lives. "I enjoy seeing their smile every time they come to collect our freshly produced organic vegetables," he says.

True to the values of SMU, Mmako also excels in fostering a culture of collaboration and accountability. "Communication is the key," he explains, noting the importance of a supportive environment where ideas are shared freely. His "Teamwork Thursday" initiative is a perfect example of his efforts to create an open and inclusive atmosphere

within his department, enabling everyone to work together towards shared goals.

One of his proudest moments has been the success of the ATM Landscape Project, where teamwork and collaboration were crucial in transforming the university grounds into a stunning focal point that highlights the hard work and dedication of the Grounds Maintenance team.

In his pursuit of excellence, Mmako believes that a successful employee must execute their work with pride, creativity, and professionalism. "One must be able to execute their work with pride, be creative and passionate, and maintain professional relations with colleagues and students," he advises.

One of Mmako's most significant achievements has been the launch of a food garden aimed at addressing food insecurity in higher education. In collaboration with the School of Nutrition and Nursing, the vegetable garden program has become a vital resource for students, teaching them about vegetable propagation techniques while promoting healthier lifestyles. His vision extends beyond just his role at SMU, as a co-founder of the Horticultural Green Group, he mentors aspiring horticulturists and actively participates in environmental awareness campaigns, promoting sustainable practices for a greener, healthier future.

Looking ahead, Mmako aspires to advance in a management role, continuing to contribute to key projects that have a lasting impact on the university and its community. He says: "I am very proud to be part of this community," and his dedication to SMU's values shines through in every project he undertakes. His message to fellow support employees is simple but powerful: "Love what you do, be innovative, and come up with different ideas. Your work must have an impact, and you must always challenge yourself to exceed your targets."

Through his passion for horticulture, his unwavering commitment to teamwork, and his deep-rooted belief in SMU's values, Mmako continues to set the bar high for what it means to be an outstanding employee and a valued member of the SMU community.



# Thirty years of dedicated support as a pillar of SMU students' success

- By Dimakatso Modise

**F**rans Teffo has been a vital part of Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) for over thirty years. He has dedicated his career to supporting students with financial challenges. As part of the Finance Department under Student Debtors, he has consistently exceeded his official duties to assist students during stressful times.

Teffo's role involves administering student fee accounts, issuing statements, and ensuring the collection of outstanding fees. However, it is his compassionate approach to these responsibilities that sets him apart.

Located in Ga-Rankuwa, Pretoria, SMU is one of South Africa's leading institutions dedicated to health sciences education. Named after the South African political leader and educationist Sefako Makgatho, the university prides itself on producing skilled professionals in fields such as medicine, nursing, oral health, pharmacy, public health, and sciences.

The institution has a rich history, originating as the Medical University of Southern Africa (MEDUNSA). Over time, it evolved into a dynamic and inclusive university, offering top-quality education and training to students from across the country and beyond.

Raised in Ga-Mashashane, Limpopo, in a family of modest means led by a single parent, Teffo understands the struggles of financial hardship. His upbringing shaped his empathy and determination to assist students, especially those navigating the pressures of university life.

“Helping students achieve their goals is what drives me. I enjoy seeing them succeed, no matter the challenges,” Teffo says. His efforts often extend beyond his official duties, offering students advice on financial aid options such as NSFAS and helping them find solutions during registration and other critical periods.

Bongumusa Nkamana, a student who has completed his BSc in Physical Mineral Sciences and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Chemistry, recalls how Teffo guided him during a frustrating registration process. “He helped me with patience and a smile. His humour and kindness made all the difference. Frans is a father to us all,” Nkamana says.

Teffo attributes much of his ability to assist students to the collaborative spirit within the finance department. “The unity among colleagues makes it much easier to help students. I encourage everyone to work together so students feel supported and at home,” he explains.

As an institution, SMU is committed to fostering excellence in teaching, learning, research, and community engagement. It offers a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes aimed at addressing the critical skills shortages in the health sector.

With state-of-the-art facilities and a strong emphasis on experiential learning, SMU equips its students with the knowledge and skills to make a meaningful impact in their communities. The university also places significant focus on addressing South Africa's healthcare challenges, making it a vital contributor to the nation's well-being.

Over his 33 years at SMU, Teffo has witnessed countless students overcome financial hurdles and graduate, achieving what once seemed impossible. For him, these moments are the ultimate reward, a testament to the importance of kindness and understanding.

In a world where financial constraints often hinder access to education, Teffo remains a beacon of hope and a reminder that dedication and humanity can make a profound difference. His legacy at SMU will continue to inspire colleagues and students for years.

“Helping students achieve their goals is what drives me. I enjoy seeing them succeed, no matter the challenges.”



**Groundbreaking  
Hepatitis B  
diagnostic assay  
poised to save  
countless lives**

In a remarkable achievement, Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) Master's student Nondumiso Nkosi has developed a pioneering diagnostic assay for Hepatitis B, addressing a critical need in regions where the disease is endemic. This innovation has earned her recognition as a rising star in the intellectual property (IP) landscape.

Nkosi's journey into innovation and entrepreneurship began with her attendance at the Bio Africa Convention in 2023, where her project was selected for presentation and won the runner-up award. "This recognition was an eye-opener, making me realise the magnitude and potential impact of my work," she reflects.

Her diagnostic assay aims to bridge the gap in accessible and efficient Hepatitis B diagnosis, particularly in resource-limited settings. "Current diagnostic methods are often inaccessible or inadequate, making early detection and effective management difficult," Nkosi explains. Her innovation provides a more accessible and efficient solution tailored to the African healthcare landscape.

The collaboration with the Department of Clinical Laboratory Medicine at Nagoya City University Hospital in Japan served as a foundational base for the innovation. "This partnership enabled the development of a diagnostic tool tailored to the unique healthcare challenges in Africa," Nkosi notes.

With the unwavering support of her supervisor, Dr Omphile Simani, Nkosi's innovation holds significant potential for the early detection and management of Hepatitis, contributing substantially to public health solutions. "Dr Simani saw the potential in my vision and encouraged me every step of the way," Nkosi acknowledges.

The SMU Technology Transfer Office (TTO) has been instrumental in supporting Nkosi's innovation, providing guidance on intellectual property protection and commercialisation. "We are working with Nkosi and Simani to identify potential industry partners to commercialise the assay," says Mohlatlego Sebola, who is responsible for establishing and operationalising the TTO.

Nkosi's achievement is a testament to the university's commitment to innovation and entrepreneurship. As SMU Acting Vice-Chancellor Professor Tandi Matsha-Erasmus notes: "Our commitment at SMU is clear: we

nurture innovation, excellence, and community service. Nkosi's innovation is a shining example of this commitment."

The impact of Nkosi's innovation extends beyond the academic realm. Hepatitis B is a major global health challenge, ranking as the seventh leading cause of death worldwide. Millions of people, particularly in Africa, suffer from chronic HBV infections, leading to severe liver disease, cirrhosis, and hepatocellular carcinoma.

Nkosi's diagnostic assay has the potential to save countless lives by providing an accessible and efficient diagnostic solution. Her innovation serves as a beacon of hope for those affected by Hepatitis B, and her story is a testament to the power of dedication, innovation, and collaboration in driving positive change.

As Nkosi continues to break barriers in biomedical innovation, she remains committed to her vision of improving public health outcomes. Her pioneering diagnostic assay for Hepatitis B is a groundbreaking achievement that has the potential to revolutionise public health outcomes.



"Our commitment at SMU is clear: we nurture innovation, excellence, and community service. Nkosi's innovation is a shining example of this commitment."

# Seasoned broadcaster set to revolutionise SA campus radio through SMU FM

- By Tumelo Moila



In a bold move to strengthen its media presence and cultivate the next generation of broadcasting talent, Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) recently appointed Themba “Tectonics” Chauke as the new SMU FM Coordinator. With a wealth of experience spanning community, commercial, and public radio, Chauke's appointment signals SMU's commitment to recruiting top industry professionals to enhance student-led media and transform SMU FM into a leading campus-based radio station.

Chauke, a seasoned broadcaster with an impressive track record in radio production, content strategy, and media mentorship,

brings a vision of innovation, excellence, and collaboration to SMU FM. His appointment aligns with the university's ongoing efforts to enrich student experiences through dynamic and professional media platforms. Under his leadership, SMU FM is set to become a powerhouse of student broadcasting, offering a training ground for young media professionals while amplifying the voice of SMU's student community.

Chauke's passion for radio was ignited at a young age, fascinated by how presenters connected with audiences. This early interest led him to pursue a degree in Media Studies and Communications at the University of Limpopo, where he refined his craft as a presenter and producer at Radio Turf.

In 2013, he took his first professional step at Malamulele Community Radio (Mala FM), later moving through Choice FM, Energy FM, and Vhembe FM. His breakthrough came at Capricorn FM, a commercial radio station in Limpopo, where he gained exposure to a broader audience and an in-depth understanding of the industry.

"Like many in the industry, my journey required perseverance, long hours, and an unwavering commitment to my craft," Chauke reflects. His experience spans community, commercial, and public radio, each platform shaping his approach to broadcasting. At Munghana Lonene FM (SABC), he held multiple roles in content production, sound imaging, and music direction, playing a crucial role in shaping the station's musical identity.

He was also instrumental in conceptualising the theme for the 19th edition of the Xitsonga Music Awards, "Ku rila xinari," showcasing his influence in creative direction and programming strategy.

"Each station taught me something unique—community radio grounded me in grassroots engagement, commercial radio refined my content packaging, and public radio gave me a broader perspective on audience needs," Chauke shares.

#### **A new era for SMU FM**

In December 2024, Chauke stepped into his new role as SMU FM Coordinator, ready to elevate campus radio and nurture future broadcasting talent. "It was an incredible



"It is an incredible honour to join SMU FM. I see immense potential here, and I am committed to turning it into a thriving platform for students and the wider community."

honour and a humbling moment," he says. "SMU FM has great potential, and I am excited about shaping it into a thriving student/community media platform."

His vision for SMU FM is ambitious. He aims to enhance content quality, expand training programmes for presenters and producers, and integrate campus media with broader university activities. Chauke is already engaging with established radio stations to create collaborative training opportunities for students. "Collaboration is key," he explains. "I'm in talks with other radio stations to develop strategies that will help students gain hands-on industry experience."

Beyond broadcasting, Chauke envisions a culture of innovation, creativity, and inclusivity at SMU FM. He believes that teamwork and a healthy work environment are essential for success. "A great leader listens, provides guidance, and encourages creative freedom while maintaining a clear direction," he emphasises. Mentorship is a core pillar of Chauke's leadership approach. Through workshops, mentorship programmes, and partnerships with industry professionals, he hopes to equip students with real-world experience.

"SMU FM should be a platform that nurtures and develops young media talent," he asserts. "By exposing students to professional broadcasting techniques and industry trends, we can ensure they graduate with a competitive edge. Chauke is also focused on enhancing student engagement through interactive programming, live campus discussions, and student-driven content. He believes that radio should reflect the student experience, addressing topics relevant to university life, career development, and social issues.

"Chauke acknowledges the mentors and colleagues who have played a significant role in his journey, fuelling his passion for radio and leadership. "Support systems matter, and I am grateful for those who believed in my journey," he shares. Looking ahead, he hopes to build a legacy of excellence at SMU FM, shaping it into a premier campus radio station that consistently produces top industry talent. With his visionary leadership, extensive industry experience, and deep passion for radio, Chauke is poised to transform SMU FM into a powerhouse of student broadcasting.

# An unparalleled university:

Empowering  
communities and  
transforming  
lives

- By Tshimangadzo Mphaphuli



Against a backdrop of rapid change in global healthcare and research, Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) stands as a dynamic force, driving transformative innovations across the health sciences. SMU's brightest minds are not only shaping the future of medicine and research—they are creating tangible, life-changing impact through groundbreaking initiatives and strategic partnerships.

One shining example of SMU's transformative vision is the Oral Health Centre, which is revolutionising dental care for thousands. Serving an astonishing 10,500 patients monthly, the centre has become the heart of South African healthcare, setting new standards in dental treatment and community well-being. By combining advanced clinical techniques with compassionate care, the centre demonstrates how SMU is directly impacting patient outcomes and raising the bar for oral health services across the nation.

In parallel, SMU is breaking new ground through international collaborations that enhance student success and global research. Recently, the university has welcomed international funders into its fold, strengthening vital partnerships that open up unprecedented opportunities for student development. These alliances not only provide critical financial backing but also integrate global best practices into the academic environment, ensuring that students gain a competitive edge in an increasingly interconnected world. The infusion of international expertise and resources is transforming SMU's educational landscape, empowering the next generation of healthcare professionals to innovate and excel on a global stage.

Further amplifying its impact, SMU's Medical Education, Clinical Research and Utilisation (MECRU) unit is at the forefront of advancing clinical research and community health. Through MECRU, SMU is spearheading projects that address pressing public health challenges, from improving treatment protocols to pioneering preventative care strategies. The work carried out by MECRU exemplifies how focused, research-driven initiatives can translate into

real-world benefits, directly contributing to the improvement of community health outcomes and the overall resilience of the healthcare system.

In an era defined by collaboration, SMU has also joined forces with leading universities across the country to revolutionise health research in South Africa. The strategic collaborations harness the collective expertise of the nation's top institutions to tackle some of the most complex healthcare issues of our time. By pooling resources, sharing cutting-edge technologies, and fostering interdisciplinary dialogue, these partnerships are catalysing breakthroughs that have the potential to reshape public health policies and clinical practices on a national—and indeed global—scale.

SMU's success, however, is not solely the result of its state-of-the-art research facilities or its strategic partnerships; it is also built on a foundation of visionary leadership and an unwavering commitment to excellence. Academics and administrators work in unison to create an environment where innovation thrives and every challenge is met with a solution-oriented mindset. Whether it is through reimagining educational programmes, spearheading community outreach, or driving advanced research, SMU's staff exemplify the university's core ethos: transforming challenges into opportunities for impact.

The stories emerging from SMU prove the institution's pioneering spirit. They echo a unified message: that excellence in education and research is not just about intellectual prowess but about real-world application and community benefit. With every innovative project and every strategic partnership, SMU reaffirms its role as a catalyst for positive change, one that not only shapes the future of health and science but also uplifts the communities it serves.

In celebrating these transformative achievements, SMU stands tall as a pioneer in global health and science. Its visionary approach, bolstered by robust research, strategic international partnerships, and a deep commitment to community well-being, continues to set new benchmarks in the field. As SMU's brightest minds forge ahead, the future of healthcare and research looks not only promising but profoundly transformative.

“Driven by bold ideas and collaborative genius, SMU transforms challenges into life-changing opportunities, setting new standards in health and science worldwide.”





# THE SMU IMPACT: Empowering global health leaders

SMU's academic and support teams empower graduates to lead on the global stage. Their exceptional mentorship and dedication create a transformative learning environment, exemplified by the journey of Dr Realeboga Sebitso. At SMU, he received rigorous academic training and valuable leadership opportunities that instilled a resilient, service-driven mindset. This solid foundation enabled him to excel in emergency and maritime medicine, successfully navigating high-pressure challenges across international borders.

SMU's academic and support teams go beyond the call of duty—they offer hands-on guidance and real-world insights that prepare students for the complexities of modern healthcare. Sebitso's achievements are a testament to the profound impact of SMU's commitment to excellence. Through their unwavering support, SMU continues to shape future leaders who drive innovation and deliver transformative healthcare solutions worldwide.

DR. REALEBOGA SEBITSO  
SMU Doctor