

Prof Gert van Zyl delivers Guest Speech at the **CMSA ADMISSION CEREMONY**

The Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of the Free State (UFS) hosted the College of Medicine of South Africa (CMSA) admission ceremony on 9 June 2022. The admission ceremony was for candidates to become specialists in various medical disciplines such as Pathology, Cardiology, Physicians, Plastic Surgery, amongst others.

Introducing Prof Gert van Zyl as the guest speaker, the president of the College of Medicine of South Africa, Prof Johan Fagan, extolled his virtues and prowess and described Prof Van Zyl as one of the medical fraternity's most vital, intelligent publishers. Prof Fagan said: "Prof Gert van Zyl is well-learned. He completed his undergraduate and postgraduate medical qualifications at the University of the Free State and has a specialist degree in Family Medicine.

"He also completed his postgraduate diploma in Health Administration and Community Health. Prof Van Zyl completed his MBA and was awarded a gold medal for outstanding academic achievement. His other qualifications include national and international leadership skills and numerous awards from medical associations in Europe."

Starting his speech with a congratulatory message to the candidates' families, lecturers and friends, Prof Van Zyl noted that it was good fortune for them to witness their loved ones being admitted from the College of Medicine of South Africa and being addressed by good leaders in the same field.

Respect is the key to success

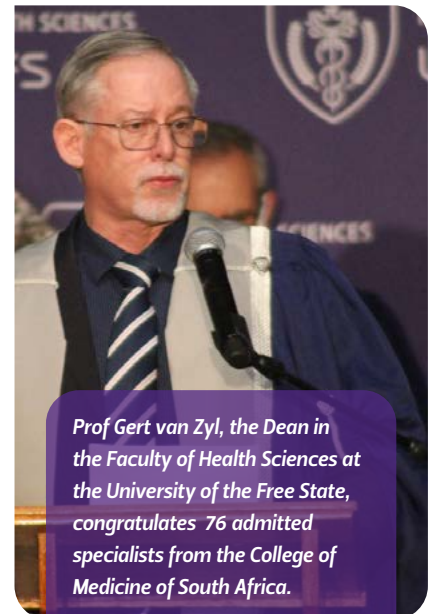
In his speech, Prof Van Zyl encouraged the specialists and spoke about respect. According to him, respect is the key to success. Seven key elements can assist you in conquering the medical environment: Resilience, Energy, Student, Patience, Emotions, Communication and Tolerance. "It was very hard and challenging during your studies, but you assured that you would get your qualification," said Prof Van Zyl.

He added: "You had a purpose, a vision of what you want to do and achieve with your new qualification. You did not look for excuses, but you stood up and looked for solutions. Therefore, it is more important that we celebrate your achievement despite the impact COVID-19 has had on your studies."

The footprint of the CMSA in central South Africa and your well-being

Prof Van Zyl concluded by saying: "Today is a very important day. It is a privilege to be here and more so to celebrate with you the first solid footprint of CMSA. I appreciate all involved, including the Senate, for their hard work. Over the past two years, we have collectively worked hard to establish a footprint for the College in Bloemfontein and succeeded. We now have a permanent space for the College, a permanent footprint, and an examination space in Bloemfontein. ■

"I am sure all will benefit from this new arrangement – College, faculty, staff, academics, registrars, and postgraduate students. Well done to all, and thank you. Thank you to Prof Senkubuge, Prof Fagan, Prof Buch, the Board and the Senate for making this dream come true. Also, thank you to my team for your efforts. Also, something to celebrate!"



Prof Gert van Zyl, the Dean in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of the Free State, congratulates 76 admitted specialists from the College of Medicine of South Africa.



President of the CMSA handing a token of appreciation to Prof Gert van Zyl.

Prof Gert van Zyl delivers Guest Speech at the CMSA ADMISSION CEREMONY ■ 1

Dr Nicholas Pearce named Best Doctor of the Year in National Batho Pele Excellence Awards ■ 2-3

Dr Winnie Byanyima's site visit to the University of the Free State, Faculty of Health Sciences facilities ■ 4

Prof Smit elected as member of prestigious American Association for Thoracic Surgery ■ 5

Dr Mutshidzi Mulondo off to the US for the prestigious Mandela Washington Fellowship ■ 6

Student voice ■ 7

Dr Nicholas Pearce named **Best Doctor of the Year** in National Batho Pele Excellence Awards

Dr Nicholas Pearce named recipient of UFS Chancellor's Medal

Dr Nicholas Pearce leading COVID-19 response at Universitas Academic Hospital

Although his name is on the award, Dr Nicholas Pearce, Head of the Department of Surgery in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of the Free State (UFS) and winner of the Batho Pele Excellence award, believes every individual he has worked with during the COVID-19 pandemic are the winners of this award.

At a ceremony last month (25 March 2022), Dr Pearce received the Best Doctor of the Year award at the National Annual Batho Pele Excellence Awards (NBPEA) for his work as head of the COVID-19 Task Team at the Universitas Academic Hospital in Bloemfontein.

"I feel that this reward reflects a team of individuals who went above and beyond during a very uncertain period in our lives. I feel elated that the team has been

acknowledged for the sterling work done during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I've been supported by a brilliant clinical team, with the likes of Dr Samantha Potgieter (Infectious Disease Specialist – UFS), Dr Shaun Maasdorp (Head: Multi ICU – UFS), Dr Edwin Turton (Head: Anaesthesiology – UFS) and many others, in running COVID-19 at the Universitas Academic Hospital and in the province," says Dr Pearce.

According to him, this award also reflects the efforts put in by the University of the Free State in supporting COVID-19 in terms of logistics and donations, particularly Prof Francis Petersen, Rector and Vice-Chancellor, Prof Prakash Naidoo, Vice-Rector: Operations, Dr Vic Coetzee, Senior Director: Information and Communication



All smiles. Dr Nicholas Pearce, Head of the Department of Surgery in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of the Free State (UFS), receiving his award as best Doctor of the Year at the annual National Batho Pele Excellence Awards from the Honourable Minister Ms Ayanda Dlodlo, Minister of Public Service and Administration (left). With them on the right is the Honourable Dr Phophi Ramathuba, MEC for Health in Limpopo.

Technology Services and his team, as well as Mr Nico Janse van Rensburg, Senior Director: University Estates and his team. It also shows how much more can be achieved in the health-care sector and overall, when the private and state sectors combine to conquer a common enemy. The award is also a reflection on the Free State Department of Health and its ability to adapt to changing burdens of disease.

Humbled and honoured by the award

A humble Dr Pearce says he feels honoured to receive this award; however, there are many unsung heroes in the public sector. He says: “This is a national award for which nominations are received from all over the country, and then the winner is selected from this group of individuals by an independent panel. There are many unsung heroes in all of our lives; teachers (university, high school, and primary school), security, and all health-care workers. There are many people who are brilliant at what they do.”

His nomination came from the hospital and the Department of Health, primarily via Dr Rita Nathan, Head of Clinical Services at Universitas Academic Hospital, but with a large amount of input from the hospital management as well as the Member of the Executive Council for Health in the Free State, the Honourable Montseng Tsui, and the Head of Department of Health, Mr Godfrey Mahlatsi.

Synonymous with fighting COVID-19

Since the early days of the pandemic, Dr Pearce's name has become synonymous with the Universitas Hospital and fighting COVID-19. He feels that this is unfortunate, as he had several people who worked hard with him and who contributed to the success of fighting this deadly disease.

“I think what made us so dynamic is that many people on the team came with many different skillsets and we were able to have an all-encompassing battle plan by harnessing the many different and individual skills to push us forward as a province.”

Impact of COVID-19

The pandemic impacted him on a personal level, says Dr Pearce. According to him, the question he is often asked is why he is working at a university. His response: “Fundamentally teaching a large population that the impact we have is beyond a single human interaction. For example, if I was purely a doctor, I would only be able to treat one patient at a time, but by working within the university, we are able to prepare our next generation of doctors and our impact is much larger and beyond just the individual patient.”

Dr Pearce believes protecting the state health-care sector is vital for the future, as this is the training platform for future doctors, specialists, and all other health-care workers. The use of resources for the betterment of society is so much more important. COVID-19 not only allowed hospitals to buy equipment that doctors would otherwise not have access to, but also allowed them to procure equipment in a rapid manner that will be used for many years to come.

The next challenge

Dr Pearce says when the COVID-19 outbreak started, he was on his way back to South Africa from Germany when he saw people wearing masks, and at the same time they were building hospitals in China in seven days. Once back at the office, he immediately approached management at the hospital and asked them to start procuring masks, PPEs, etc. “We did not really know what was going on, but I felt that this was the first step.”

When COVID-19 took over and elective surgery stopped, Dr Pearce became the chairperson of the COVID-19 task team – something he enjoyed, as it taught him a lot about management, about human interaction, and about teamwork. It also taught him about his goals and ambitions in life. Though he is back in surgery almost full time, he is looking for his next challenge. ■

I think that I, as chair of the COVID-19 task team, to get the majority of credit is somewhat disingenuous and not really reflective of all the effort that many people put into the situation.

Dr Pearce

Dr Winnie Byanyima's site visit to the University of the Free State, Faculty of Health Sciences facilities



The Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of the Free State had the privilege to host Dr Winnie Byanyima on the 29th of April 2022. Dr Byanyima is the Executive Director of UNAIDS and an Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations. The visit was coordinated by Prof Joyce Tsoka-Gwegweni, Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences.

Dr Byanyima visited several facilities in the Faculty, including the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, where Dr Azette Swanepoel presented the Clinical Skills Unit, where students perform their practicum.

Professor Mathys Labuschagne from the Clinical Simulation and Skills Unit at the School of Biomedical gave Dr Byanyima a warm welcome as they went through the clinical units with equipment used to educate students from different departments in the Faculty.

Dr Byanyima was impressed by how the Faculty is organised and prioritises the student's future. She mentioned, "It is one of the most modern and well taken care of facilities in the world where the faculty offers quality clinical services to their students".

They visited the School of Nursing to see how the Skills Unit benefits the students. Dr Jeanette Sebaeng, Head of the School of Nursing, also accompanied them to the facility where Nursing students do their clinical services.

A passionate and longstanding champion of social justice and gender equality, Ms Byanyima believes that a healthcare facility is necessary for student rights, and recalling the country's history, the Faculty proved to be one of the best for the future of students. ■

Prof Smit elected as member of prestigious American Association for Thoracic Surgery

Prof Francis E Smit has been elected as member of the American Association for Thoracic Surgery (AATS), an elite international organisation whose members have made significant contributions to the care and treatment of cardiothoracic disease throughout the world.

Prof Francis E Smit, Head of the Department of Cardiothoracic Surgery, has become only the third person from sub-Saharan Africa to receive the honour of being elected as a member of the American Association for Thoracic Surgery (AATS).

Stringent membership requirements

The AATS is an august international academic organisation founded more than a century ago by the earliest pioneers in the field of thoracic surgery, to which members are elected according to merit. Membership requires sponsorship and referees from senior and active members, followed by an extensive vetting process by the membership committee. Currently, the association has more than 1 400 active members from 41 countries. Around 30 to 40 new members are accepted annually, of which only 10 to 15 reside outside the USA and Canada. Successful applicants are selected based on an established international leadership record in the field of cardiothoracic surgery, as demonstrated by their commitment to society and institutions, training and education, research and innovation – including peer-reviewed publications, excellence in

patient care, and mentorship of the next generation of cardiothoracic surgeons. “We are extremely proud of this well-deserved international accolade bestowed on Prof Smit,” said Prof Francis Petersen, Rector and Vice-Chancellor. “Not only does it validate the high standard of cardiothoracic training at the UFS, but also our commitment to multi-disciplinary research and internationalisation.”

Benefits of membership

For Prof Smit, the main benefit of membership lies in the fact that it facilitates high-level collaboration with USA-based researchers and companies, which will contribute towards his vision of making the UFS Department of Cardiothoracic Surgery a leading multi-disciplinary research and training unit with national and international collaborators

Prof Smit is a firm believer in the potential and relevance of South African research. One of his greatest achievements since his appointment at the UFS in 2004, was the establishment of the interdisciplinary Robert WM Frater Cardiovascular Research Centre in 2015.

The Frater Centre has three divisions, namely clinical research, bio-engineering, and an integrated multi-disciplinary training and education simulation programme, establishing collaborative research and postgraduate training programmes based on a strategy of interdisciplinary, inter-university, national, and international cooperation.

World-class cardiovascular research at UFS

The clinical research division – notably the interdisciplinary cardiomyopathy study group – conducts clinical research in adult and paediatric cardiology and cardiothoracic surgery. The bio-engineering division has developed a patented tissue-engineered de-cellularised bovine pericardial patch for use in cardiovascular and other surgical disciplines. A sub-section of this division conducts research in alternative fixation processes of de-cellularised biological tissue, re-cellularisation and organoid generation, as well as in cardiovascular pharmacology. Research is also being conducted on novel heart valve designs, including testing and evaluation in bench and animal models. A world-class integrated multi-disciplinary simulation-based education and training system has been developed, catering for African needs and programmes. ■

Prof Smit is a firm believer in the potential and relevance of South African research.



Dr Mutshidzi Mulondo off to the US for the prestigious Mandela Washington Fellowship

Dr Mutshidzi Abigail Mulondo, a lecturer in the newly established Division of Public Health in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of the Free State (UFS), who was conferred with an interdisciplinary PhD during the April graduation ceremonies, will soon be jetting off to North Carolina, in the US, after being accepted for the prestigious Mandela Washington Fellowship.

Dr Mulondo was conferred a doctor of philosophy degree in Health Professions Education and Community Health on Friday (22 April 2022). She completed this PhD from the departments of Community Health and Health Sciences Education in two and a half years with three published articles, two in international journals and one in a national journal, due to sheer determination. Dr Mulondo will be joining the Mandela Washington Fellowship from the beginning of June 2022. Says Dr Mulondo: "I am delighted to be joining this year's cohort of fellows. Although I applied for the fellowship hopeful for a positive outcome, it was a wonderful surprise to receive the great news after a rigorous interview process."

Looking forward to the most

The fellowship is a flagship programme of the US government – Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI), which is focused on leveraging the work of young African leaders for greater impact. Young deserving African leaders are taken on a journey in which they get to engage with leaders in the US in an effort to provide them with a global perspective. For Dr Mulondo, the fellowship will help in her personal/leadership development. Being part of a team instrumental in establishing the first division of Public Health at the UFS, she is also looking forward to networking with colleagues in Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, where she will be placed, and hopes to soak up enough to share when she returns to South Africa.

Dr Mulondo – in her hopes to promote mental wellness – occasionally holds talks advocating for mental health and destigmatisation of mental health issues. She has received notable accolades in her life, including recognition in the Mail and Guardian Top 200 Young South Africans list, in the

Health category. She was also previously selected to the Global Young Leaders Conference (GYLC) programme – a leadership journey that develops true global citizens, in which she was hosted in Washington DC and New York in the US.

Keeping a vision board

"My wonderful mother taught me the principle of keeping a vision board at a young age and she would reiterate the scripture, 'Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it – Habakkuk 2:2'. I have taken this practice right up to my adult years. I set my mind on a goal, write down manageable steps to achieve that goal, do my part and trust that God will do His," says Dr Mulondo.

According to her, she was taught to set goals on a daily basis at her high school which followed the Accelerated Christian Education programme. It was here where she was taught to set one main goal for the day, which she worked hard to not procrastinate about. "Although I am generally a goal-oriented person, I am grateful for my support system that keeps me both focused on my purpose and grounded in life."

What is next?

Dr Mulondo says she is passionate about mental health wellness, mentorship and getting involved in projects that speak to that. She is currently the co-advisor of the Golden Key International Honor Society, UFS chapter, which gives her an opportunity to stay close to her passions.

As someone who has struggled with imposter syndrome in her life, one day when her schedule allows, she hopes to write a book based on her experiences, lessons from her brilliant mentors, and the research she would have gathered, to become a published book author. "I know imposter syndrome is a silent and debilitating battle many struggle with. My desire is to see all of us win our invisible battles and show up in this world as our best selves.

"It is my hope that my accomplishments encourage one little girl who hears about me. I challenge myself to set what may feel like impossible goals for the coming generation that is watching. May they believe that anything is indeed possible for those that believe", says Dr Mulondo of her vision. ■

Dr Mutshidzi A Mulondo, lecturer in the Division of Public Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, at the University of the Free State (UFS), during the April graduation ceremonies after she was conferred with an interdisciplinary PhD degree which she completed in 2.5 years.



Student voice

Meet Afika Soldati, a young lady from a small town in the Free State called Virginia. Soldati completed her National Senior Certificate (Grade 12) in 2014 at Harmony High School. With a great passion for Health Sciences and a dream of pursuing a career in the Medical Sciences, specifically Biomedical Sciences, Soldati applied for admission to several universities, but due to her poor performance in Grade 12, she was rejected by most.

In 2016, she received sponsorship from the JB Marks Education Trust Fund, which granted her an opportunity to register for a bridging course at the University of the Free State. This four-year course led her to obtain a BSc degree in Biochemistry and Genetics. Soldati pursued a Bachelor of Medical Science Honours degree (BMedSc) in Human Molecular Biology in 2020.

Soldati is a second-year Medical Sciences Masters candidate (MMedSc), specialising in Haematology and Cell Biology. According to her, “pursuing an MMedSc degree will help advance her research capacity, skills and techniques required for a career in molecular biology”.

Soldati became a Medical Scientist intern registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). This two-year internship-training programme is done through the university and the National Health Laboratory Services (NHLS). This internship programme is a great way to gain work experience. It will also increase her opportunities

for employment in this highly competitive field. Additionally, she holds a Research Assistant post at the Tissue Typing Laboratory and receives financial assistance from the Department of Haematology and Cell Biology.

One of the biggest challenges I have experienced in my academics was transitioning from undergraduate to postgraduate studies. There was a vast difference in the academic structure, learning environment, and the level of engagement required. However, the department provided a lot of support to the students. They encourage students to interact frequently with the supervisors, senior postgraduate students and staff.

What I like most about the department is that it provides a safe learning space and encourages students' personal and professional growth and development. I am thankful for the academic support from my supervisors Dr A de Kock, Mr JF Kloppers and everyone in the department. In the few years I have been in the department, I have learned so much about the workplace, self-development and career ambitions. I am grateful to the JB Marks Education Trust Fund, UFS Research Master's Tuition Fee Bursary and the Department of Haematology and Cell Biology for the financial support and the support of my personal development and well-being. ■



To those interested in a career in the Medical Sciences field, remember that choosing a career is one of the most important decisions in life. During my academic career, I learned that any science is more of a life commitment than a career. You require the critical skills and qualities that will make you a successful scientist one day. For those passionate about helping others, Medical Science is a great way to make a difference and positively influence people's lives.

▪ COMPILED BY THE OFFICE OF LIAISON OFFICER: CONTACT DETAILS: 0514017799 & EMAIL: MAEKOR@UFS.AC.ZA ▪



FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES PRESENTS!
**FACULTY RESEARCH
FORUM 2022**

IMPORTANT DATES

23 August 2022: Faculty Student Research Forum (hybrid)

24 August 2022: Ethics session (online) at 18:00

25–26 August 2022: Faculty Research Forum meeting

<https://forms.office.com/r/UDstxTa6Q3>

