NELSON MANDELA
UNIVERSITY

MEDICAL SCHOOL
NEWSLETTER

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MANDELA MED PULSE

BEYOND THE SCRUBS

Celebrating the people behind the profession



Change the World

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FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

WE LEARN, WE LEAD, WE CHANGE THE WORLD

There is something quietly extraordinary happening at our Medical School. Each day, in lecture rooms, wards, clinics and corridors, we are living out a simple but powerful truth: We learn, we lead, we change the world. Not always in grand gestures—but in small, persistent acts of excellence, compassion and curiosity.

This year, that truth takes on special meaning as we prepare to graduate our **first cohort of Mandela Doctors.** After years of anatomy labs, early mornings, late nights, and—let us be honest—a few "character-building" assessments, they now step forward not only as clinicians, but as leaders shaped by purpose.

As Nelson Mandela reminded us, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." In our context, that "weapon" sometimes looks like a stethoscope…or a strong cup of coffee at 2am. But learning alone is not enough. Leadership follows. And leadership, as Albertina Sisulu embodied, is about service—quiet, steadfast and deeply human.

Across this newsletter, we celebrate the stories of our staff and students who are doing exactly this: learning deeply, leading courageously, and changing lives daily. So yes—this is a moment of pride. But also one of responsibility. Because the world is waiting. And clearly, it has no idea what is coming.



Dr Reno Morar
Director, Medical School
Nelson Mandela University

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A note from the editor

Every medical student and staff member has a story beyond medicine. This edition explores life Beyond the Scrubs—celebrating the many interests, talents and experiences that make our Medical School community unique.

From writing books and mentoring fellow students to practising karate, presenting at national conferences and championing mental wellbeing, these stories remind us that the best healthcare professionals are shaped not only by what they study, but also by who they are.

We hope you enjoy getting to know the people behind the profession.
Fihliwe Klaas, Editor

STAFF STORIES

Meet our New Staff

Five Questions with Fihliwe Klaas
Student Success Coach



Fihliwe Klaas
Student Success Coach

Fihliwe Klaas is a Counselling Psychologist and Student Success Coach at Mandela University's Medical School. She holds a Bachelor of Science (UFS), BA Hons Psych (UNISA) and MA Counselling Psychology (NMU).

1. What inspired you to join the Medical School?

My interest has always been in mental health and wellbeing, particularly ensuring that students from underprivileged communities have access to support. At the Medical School, I can support future doctors with their personal growth, mental health and overall wellbeing.

2. What does "student success" mean beyond academic achievement?

It means succeeding academically while maintaining physical and psychological health, social connections, financial and spiritual wellbeing. We want graduates who are socially conscious, ethical, resilient and healthy.

3. What advice would you give students struggling to find balance?

Never forget to make the main thing the main thing. But always prioritise the things that make you feel more alive and joyful.

4. What does life beyond work look like for you?

I love reading, walking and being in nature, listening to music and podcasts, attending concerts and spending time with loved ones.

5. What might students be surprised to learn about you?

I'm a house head and music lover. Before starting my master's degree, I learnt to DJ because I'd always wanted to become one. I believe we should explore our gifts and talents and pursue what sets our souls on fire.

Five Questions with Associate Professor Luzuko Magula | HOD: Psychiatry and Mental Health



Associate Professor Luzuko Magula
Head of Department: Psychiatry and Mental Health

Associate Professor Luzuko Magula leads clinical and academic psychiatric services at Mandela University and across the western Eastern Cape/Nelson Mandela Bay Metro. He holds an MBChB (WSU), DMH and FCPsych (CMSA), MMed (SU), Cert C&APsych (CMSA), MPhil (SU) and PGDip (UCT). A subspecialist Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, he also oversees provincial services and training in the field.

1. What attracted you to psychiatry and child and adolescent psychiatry?

Growing up, I was compassionate and soft-spoken – often the listener and conflict resolver. I was fascinated by human behaviour and how it could be harnessed positively. I chose child and adolescent psychiatry because prevention is better than cure, and childhood is the best time to shape minds and influence behaviour.

2. What message would you like every medical student to remember about mental wellbeing?

Prioritise your mental health, happiness and psychological wellbeing. Safeguard your inner self and values, and don't compromise them. Know when to start, and know when to stop.

3. How do you hope to support students?

I have an open-door policy. I listen to understand, particularly when someone is experiencing a crisis, and offer whatever support is available to help them move forward.

4. What does life beyond medicine look like for you?

I enjoy spending time with my wife and children and keeping active through exercise, which also supports my mental wellbeing.

5. What might colleagues and students be surprised to learn about you?

I used to rap and grew up wanting to become a DJ – a dream that's still quietly brewing!

STAFF RECOGNITION

Personal Inspiration Drives Diabetes Research



> ***As an emerging researcher, you need to work collaboratively while finding your own identity and area of expertise.***

Dr Mabena | *PhD graduate*

Seeing family members live with diabetes and stroke-related complications inspired Dr Philanathi Mabena's research journey, culminating in a PhD exploring the potential of cocoa-derived compounds to protect against complications associated with Type 2 diabetes, writes *Fihliwe Klaas*.

Dr Mabena, a lecturer in Mandela University's Department of Human Biology and Integrated Pathology, first researched stroke patients during his master's studies before turning to Type 2 diabetes and its complications.

"My aunt and uncle both battled diabetes and stroke-related complications," says Dr Mabena. "There was a motivation to understand what these individuals were going through and to see whether there was any way that we could help ease their suffering."

His PhD was not without setbacks, including lost research samples, delays importing specialised chemicals and antibodies, funding constraints and balancing research with full-time employment.

Dr Mabena has presented his research at the Pan-African PG and PDRF Research Conference and IBRO World Congress in Spain. Findings have been published in IBRO Neuroscience Reports and Applied Sciences, with two further manuscripts under review.

He now plans to focus on vascular health and early blood-vessel changes associated with increased risk of complications from hypertension, diabetes and stroke.

"As an emerging researcher, you need to work collaboratively while finding your own identity and area of expertise," he says.

Why this research matters

Dr Mabena's PhD investigated cocoa (Theobroma cacao) in a Type 2 diabetes rat model. His findings indicated potential neuro- and vasculo-protective benefits, including enhanced retinal structure and preservation of vascular and nerve tissue integrity.

Supervisor: Prof P Nkomozepi
Co-supervisor: Prof EF Mbajiorgu

Recognition for a Passion for Rural Medicine



Dr Angela Hartwig
Discovery Foundation Rural Fellowship

Dr Angela Hartwig, Medical Officer at Adelaide Hospital in the Eastern Cape, received a Discovery Foundation Rural Fellowship Award in the Individual category for Senior Rural Doctors in April 2026, recognising her commitment to rural healthcare and academic development.

The fellowship will support her project, Optimisation of Care for Patients Requiring Long-Term Anticoagulation in a Rural District Hospital in the Eastern Cape, undertaken in Adelaide Hospital's Medical Wards under the supervision of Professor Saiendhra Moodley from 1 September 2026 to 28 February 2027. Her research will explore ways to improve long-term anticoagulation care in rural district hospitals, where access to specialist services, regular monitoring and patient education can be challenging, with the aim of generating practical, evidence-based recommendations for rural healthcare. Dr Hartwig's previous honours include the RuDASA Rural Doctor of the Year Award in 2020, inclusion in the Mail & Guardian's 200 Young South Africans, and the Eastern Cape Youth Awards Health Category in 2021.

About Dr Hartwig

Dr Hartwig holds an MBChB from the University of Pretoria, a Postgraduate Diploma in the Clinical Management of HIV/AIDS from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and a Master of Public Health from the University of Liverpool. She joined Adelaide Hospital in 2020 and served as Acting CEO from June 2024 to October 2025.

STUDENT STORIES

Beyond the Scrubs

These stories showcase the many dimensions of Mandela medical students beyond their academic studies.

More than Medicine

Second-year medical student finds healing, purpose and connection through writing



> ***The book is about life as a journey.***
>
> ***Yibanathi Bumka***

Medicine may be his chosen career, but Yibanathi Bumka is also a mentor and self-published author whose writing explores grief, healing and emotional expression. By Fihliwe Klaas.

Originally from Mount Ayliff in the Eastern Cape, Bumka began writing short stories in isiXhosa in Grade 12. Following a personal heartbreak in April 2023, he wrote his first poem and discovered a way to express difficult emotions.

Writing took on deeper significance after the loss of his brother in 2024 and, later, his father. Poetry became a way of processing grief, healing and remembrance.

Initially writing predominantly in isiXhosa, Bumka moved into English to reach a wider audience and decided in July and August 2025 to compile his poems into a book. He self-published *This is Who I Am* (2026) using money from his NSFAS allowance.

"The book is about life as a journey," he says. "We need companions along the way, and we need to be flexible enough to adapt to circumstances while allowing ourselves to feel every step of the journey."

Different parts of one person

Alongside medicine and writing, Bumka mentors fellow students. Balancing these roles takes discipline, particularly when motivation or energy runs low.

"I do not see these roles as separate identities; they are different parts of the same person," he says.

Medicine is his career, while writing helps him understand himself and connect with others. Mentorship allows him to give back through his belief in Ubuntu.

His father remains his greatest motivator and teacher. His name, Yibanathi – "Be with us" or "May God be with us" – reminds him to remain connected to family, values, culture, traditions and community wherever life takes him.

This is Who I Am explores healing, positive masculinity, love, relationships, community and emotional expression. Bumka particularly hopes to encourage men to express their feelings, while emphasising that emotions and personal growth are universal.

Gold, Grit and Growth

Medical student finds balance, discipline and a different kind of challenge through karate



Nezaan Swartz

Third-year medical student Nezaan Swartz returned from the University Sport South Africa (USSA) Championships with an impressive medal haul – and proof that there's life beyond the lecture hall. By Fihliwe Klaas.

Representing Mandela University in the intermediate division at the national tournament hosted by the University of the Western Cape, Swartz won gold in individual kata, individual kumite and team kata, and bronze in team kumite.

Despite fielding a relatively small semi-contact karate team, Mandela University finished fourth nationally.

Swartz began karate in 2015, when she was in Grade 5, after her parents introduced her to the sport through a newly opened dojo. It has since become an important outlet from the demands of medicine.

"Karate is a good de-stresser. It's become a place where I can express myself in ways other than academically. I don't think I would be who I am without it."

Finding the balance

Swartz often starts studying at 4am so she can train in the evenings.

"It's difficult, but because I enjoy doing both, it doesn't feel like an obligation," she says. "I want to study and I want to train."

Karate has also taught her patience and perseverance – lessons she carries into her studies.

"You don't always get things right the first time," she says. "Karate taught me that growth comes from the time and effort you invest."

Swartz is now working towards her black belt, using upcoming competitions to stay sharp ahead of her grading later this year, while completing the pre-clinical phase of her medical studies. Her younger brother also practises karate, and his dedication motivates her to keep growing.

Swartz sees a strong connection between karate and medicine:
"Medicine means being fully present for every patient, listening carefully and staying calm under pressure. Every case deserves the same focus as a karate contest."

Award-winning Peer Mentors

Boitumelo Khoza and Thimna Makhuphula

Leading by Example

Mentorship that matters



Boitumelo Khoza
Going beyond the call of duty



Thimna Makhuphula
Building the next generation

For medical students Boitumelo Khoza and Thimna Makhuphula, peer mentorship is about much more than offering advice. Their commitment to helping others has earned both students recognition – and created an impact that reaches well beyond the classroom.

MBChB student and Peer Mentor Boitumelo Khoza has been recognised with the Going Beyond the Call of Duty Award for Exceptional Leadership and Service for her commitment to supporting fellow students.

After helping a fellow student who could not afford to travel home during recess, Khoza was inspired to establish a student-led travel assistance initiative to help others facing similar financial challenges return home safely. Her initiative has been recognised as Ubuntu in action: identifying a need and doing something meaningful about it.

For MBChB student and Peer Mentor Thimna Makhuphula, leadership is creating a ripple effect.

A member of the Peer Mentor Programme since 2025, Makhuphula received the **Legacy Builder Award for Inspiring the Next Generation** in recognition of his commitment to mentoring and willingness to step beyond his formal responsibilities to support the programme.

Perhaps the clearest measure of that impact is one of his own mentees, who was inspired to become a Peer Mentor – carrying forward the same culture of service and leadership.

EVENTS & INITIATIVES

SAAHE 2026

Shaping How We Learn

Staff Perspective

Sharing the vision of the Mandela Doctor at SAAHE 2026
By Dr Yoshna Kooverjee



As our first cohort of medical students completes final year, it is a natural time to reflect on the pedagogical practices that will culminate in the graduation of our first Mandela Doctors. The South African Association for Health Educationalists (SAAHE) Conference 2026 provided an ideal platform to share our work, learn from others and advance our vision of developing fit-for-purpose health professionals.

Held in Stellenbosch from 30 June to 3 July under the theme Unravelling the Future of Health Professions Education, SAAHE 2026 featured contributions from six Mandela University academic staff, three students, our MBChB programme coordinator and Director of School. Presentations spanned the six-year programme, sharing insights from the considerable task of developing a new medical programme.

Dr Savania Nagiah reflected on establishing and delivering an integrated MBChB curriculum at a new medical school, framed through the metaphor of "building the plane while flying it".

Dr Yoshna Kooverjee and second-year student Nthabiseng Tshabalala presented Lessons from a Medicinal Garden: Cultural Humility, Co-creation and Planetary Health, exploring connections between medicinal plants, cultural practices and Western knowledge.

Cindy Booysen presented research on student engagement in the first-year Theory & Practice of Medicine module, while Dr Saadiya Seedat and fifth-year student Tristan Strydom shared their use of mind maps to promote knowledge integration and clinical reasoning among fourth-year Internal Medicine students at Livingstone Hospital.

Dr Keshena Naidoo participated in a pre-conference workshop on Longitudinal Integrated Clerkships and presented on the development and implementation of Mandela University's 20-week rural district hospital rotation for sixth-year medical students.

Dr Khuliso Ramashia and Prof Elma de Vries presented a workshop on creating inclusive spaces for diverse students in classrooms and clinical learning environments.

The Medical School's transdisciplinary approach was highlighted by Nobuntu Ntantiso, from the Department of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics, who shared multilingualism work delivered in the first- and second-year curricula.

Learning and connecting

Staff contributions were well received, creating new relationships, reconnecting established networks and opening possibilities for future collaboration.

A standout presentation came from Prof Marco de Carvalho-Filho, Professor of Research in Health Profession Education and Training at University Medical Centre Groningen. His pedagogy of connection emphasised that engagement drives learning and empathy is integral to professionalism.

Delegates also valued workshops spanning Interprofessional Education and Collaborative Practice, Adaptive Expertise and Longitudinal Integrated Clerkships.

We were particularly proud of our students' presentations and involvement in the conference, which they reflect on in the accompanying student feature.

We are grateful for the sponsorship that enabled conference attendance, particularly the opportunities afforded to our student delegates. The Mandela Doctor shines bright, and we look forward to future engagements that continue building this growing constellation.

Student Perspective

Learning Beyond the Lecture Theatre

Three Mandela University medical students took their place alongside clinicians, researchers and educators at SAAHE 2026, sharing their own work and perspectives on the future of health professions education.

Representing different stages of their MBChB journey, Nthabiseng Tshabalala, Reaoleboga Ramatlhape and Tristan Strydom didn't simply attend: they presented their work, joined wider academic discussions and brought student perspectives to the conversation.

Here, they share what they presented, what challenged their thinking and what they brought home from SAAHE.



Meaningful change is built through collaboration.

Nthabiseng Tshabalala
Second-Year MBChB Student

Co-presenting *Lessons from a Medicinal Garden: Cultural Humility, Co-creation and Planetary Health* alongside Dr Yoshna Kooverjee was the highlight of my conference experience. Sharing our Medical School's commitment to producing culturally competent doctors through co-creation was deeply meaningful.

I also felt honoured to engage in dialogue about student agency during the student plenary. I challenged the narrative that students are being silenced; rather, they are often sidelined by top-down frameworks that fail to recognise them as valuable partners in shaping their curriculum.

I walked away deeply grateful for the hands that tend the garden and the minds that keep this knowledge alive – a reminder that meaningful change is built through collaboration.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Students should be meaningful partners in shaping their education.



Empathy begins long before we meet our patients.

Reaoleboga Ramatlhape
Third-Year MBChB Student

Sharing my campfire story at SAAHE was an experience I will always remember. I was the only student presenting independently in my session, so standing before lecturers, clinicians and healthcare professionals from different universities was initially intimidating. Once I began, however, I found my feet and shared something that had shaped me.

Empathy Expanded from the Body, the Family, and the System explored how empathy begins long before we meet our patients. From the anatomy laboratory to experiences in my own life, I have learnt that empathy is about seeing the person before the diagnosis and recognising the struggles, hopes and dreams that cannot be separated from illness.

I left reassured that, despite the challenges of working in healthcare, empathy still has a place, and inspired to become more involved in research and health professions education.

KEY TAKEAWAY

See the person before the diagnosis.



> ***...effective learning can be structured and academically rigorous without losing creativity.***

Tristan Strydom
Fifth-Year MBChB Student

Co-presenting From Memorising to Meaning-Making: Mind Maps as a Tool for Internal Medicine Education in a Resource-Constrained Hospital with Dr Saadiya Seedat allowed me to share the student perspective on how mind maps helped us connect and better understand complex internal medicine concepts during fourth year.

The conference also challenged assumptions I had not realised I held. It prompted me to question whether students should remain passive recipients of teaching, whether educational innovation always requires sophisticated technology, and whether adding more information necessarily produces deeper understanding.

We deliberately made the presentation engaging, demonstrating that effective learning can be structured and academically rigorous without losing creativity. I left SAAHE with a broader view of what medical education can be and a greater appreciation for the role students can play in improving it.

KEY TAKEAWAY

More information doesn't necessarily mean deeper understanding.

Bringing it home

The students returned from SAAHE grateful to the Mandela University staff who made their participation possible and supported them throughout the experience. Seeing their lecturers share their work alongside health professions educators from across the country was equally inspiring.

For the trio, the experience reinforced what it means to be a Mandela Doctor: to be patient-centred, community-orientated and committed not only to improving healthcare, but also to shaping how future healthcare professionals learn. Their message to fellow students is simple: stay curious, seek out opportunities and don't underestimate the contribution your own perspective can make.



Crazy Socks, Serious Message





> ***Behind every white coat is a human being.***

Bright, mismatched socks brought a splash of colour to Mandela University's Medical School – and opened an important conversation about the mental health and wellbeing of the people who care for others.

Students and staff pulled on their most colourful, craziest socks on 5 June to mark Crazy Socks 4 Docs Day, joining a global movement raising awareness about mental health and wellbeing among healthcare professionals.

But behind the colourful display was a serious message: behind every white coat is a human being who may face personal challenges.

Students were encouraged to recognise the pressures that can accompany medical training and the importance of looking after their own wellbeing, seeking support when they need it and helping to create a culture in which conversations about mental health can happen openly.

Safe to Speak Up

Associate Professor Luzuko Magula
Head of Department: Psychiatry and Mental Health

Addressing students on the theme Safe to Speak Up, Prof Magula stressed that caring for their own mental health is just as important as looking out for the wellbeing of their peers.

His message was to speak up early. Identifying mental health challenges sooner can allow them to be managed more effectively – and students should know that they do not have to navigate difficult periods alone.

Behind the White Coat

Fihliwe Klaas
Counselling Psychologist and Student Success Coach, Medical School

Fihliwe Klaas turned the focus to the person behind the profession. Doctors, she reminded students, are human beings first.

Her talk encouraged students to make space for life beyond medicine by caring for themselves, nurturing hobbies and developing healthy ways of coping with pressure. Looking after their own wellbeing, she emphasised, is an important part of being able to care for others.

CRAZY SOCKS 4 DOCS

Founded by Australian cardiologist Dr Geoff Toogood after an experience involving mismatched socks and comments about his mental state, Crazy Socks 4 Docs has grown into an international mental-health awareness campaign. Launched in 2017, it is marked annually on the first Friday of June.

67 MINUTES, LASTING IMPACT

Medical students take health screening and education into the community for Mandela Day



Health checks where people are

Staff and third-year medical students from Mandela University's Department of Medical Practice took health screening and education to Greenacres, Kenako and Cleary Park shopping centres on 23 July as part of their third-term Health Promotion Day.

The outreach also supported the 67-minute community service initiative associated with Nelson Mandela International Day, commemorated annually on 18 July.

Students worked in staggered groups of no more than 17 per mall to prevent congestion. Under the guidance of health professionals, they measured shoppers' blood pressure and blood glucose levels and provided relevant health education.

Across the three malls, 391 shoppers were screened, with 30 referred to local clinics for repeat testing and further management after abnormal readings were recorded.

Planning for impact

The event was organised largely by Community Platform Coordinator Thabo Sempe and Acting Module Leader Dr Amy Stickells, supported by Department of Medical Practice staff and clinical facilitators.

Planning begins a year in advance and includes liaison with shopping-centre management and exhibition coordinators, venue selection, student scheduling, documentation and transport arrangements.

The teams spent about four-and-a-half hours at the malls, where feedback from shoppers was enthusiastic. Some asked about additional health services and were directed to their local clinics, while others wanted to know whether the screening service was regularly available.

Behind the day

The Medical School thanked management representatives at Greenacres, Kenako and Cleary Park shopping centres, along with Clinical Skills Laboratory staff and transport, logistics and administrative staff, for supporting the initiative and giving students an opportunity to practise their blood-pressure measurement skills in a community setting. Planning for Health Promotion Day 2027 is already under way.



3 Malls

391 Shoppers screened

30 Referrals for follow-up care

Third-year medical students marked Nelson Mandela International Day by taking health promotion into the heart of Gqeberha's communities – combining practical learning with service.

FUNDING

DONATIONS: STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE



1) ENGAGEMENT

Medical School engages with potential donors



2) EMAIL CONFIRMATION

Donor sends email to Medical School **sherwin.king@mandela.ac.za** confirming amount and general conditions (e.g. first-year)



3) GENERATION OF INVOICE

Email confirmation sent to Ms Jennilee Bezuidenhout **jennilee.bezuidenhout@mandela.ac.za** who issues Trust invoice to donor



4) ISSUING OF INVOICE

The invoice: bank details + short information form for Section 18A tax certificate



5) PAYMENT RECEIPT

Donor pays invoice – funds transferred to Financial Aid under donor conditions



6) FUNDING ALLOCATION

Medical School + Financial Aid allocate funding to student/s in need



7) ISSUING OF S18A CERTIFICATE

The Trust issues thank you letter + Section 18A tax certificate



8) ISSUING OF B-BBEE CERTIFICATE

B-BBEE certification (if required) arranged with Faculty of Health Sciences after funds have been disbursed.

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