# The launch of Sefako Makgatho Health Science University (SMU)

**Media Statement - 14 April 2015**

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Chairperson of the Interim Council



On this historic day of the 14th of April 2015, we are gathered here in Garankuwa, Pretoria to open a university that will spread its wings by leaps and bounds from local, to national, regional and international platforms. It is a university that is responding to changes in the health environment with the seismic shift epitomised by the global movement towards universal health coverage, which calls for ending inequalities in access to quality health care. With the advent of the national health insurance in South Africa, the university is poised to produce a health workforce that is equipped with the skills to develop, maintain, evaluate and monitor the new system that will finance and provide quality health care to all South Africans.

This university is being established in an era that calls for the internationalization and competitiveness of higher education. Health workers who can innovate are in demand across the country and the world. Today there is an increasing globalization of health matters and a changing nature of the disease burden where an epidemiological transition is taking place. This new university will respond to this changing environment, one complicated by an incongruence between the students’ demand for new ways of learning and educators who may still use traditional approaches to teaching.

In a book titled “Leading the Revolution”, which the then Deputy President of South Africa gave me in 2001 at the launch of the MEDUNSA-Stellenbosch University Post-Graduate Diploma on HIV/AIDS, author Gary Hamel says “it is not knowledge that produces new wealth, but insight into opportunities for discontinuous innovation. Discovery is the journey, insight is the destination. ” (2000, Page 13). Since you gave me this book at the turn of this century, I have held to the view that it is not a simple accumulation of knowledge that matters, but what we do with it to advance the lives of our people.

Consequently, our hope is that this university will be a fountain that spurts graduates nationally, regionally and internationally with insights into innovative health systems that use new technological approaches and tools to provide quality health services and save lives. As Hamel puts it, these revolutionaries “don’t tinker into the margins; they blow up old … models and create new ones.” (P. 16). Sefako Makgatho University graduates will need to create new models that will underpin new health systems through research evidence and innovation. This is our hope for the new university.

Future graduates are advised to take the dictum of Thomas Kuhn, in his now classic book “the Structure of Scientific Revolution” that states “confronted with … crisis scientists take a different attitude towards existing paradigms, and the nature of their research changes accordingly. The proliferations of competing articulations , … the expression of discontent, … and … debate over fundamentals, all these are symptoms of a transition from normal to extraordinary research.” (1970) We believe our students, armed with knowledge, will conduct extraordinary research to find innovative ways to improve the quality of health services and design health systems that serve the public.

What will make this university stand above the rest may very well be adopting a philosophy of moving from good to great, which is so clearly articulated by the author of one of the bestselling research management books, Jim Collins (2001).

Collins argues that the companies that move from good to great are clear what they are passionate about (and understand themselves), what they can be the best in (and for) the world at, and what drives their economic engine – these are the three circles of the Hedgehog Concept. This approach, according to Collins, requires “disciplined people”, who engage in “disciplined thought” processes and take “disciplined action” (Jim Collins).

With this philosophy and through the painstaking, creative and meticulous application of new scientific knowledge to old problems of poor health systems and inadequate health service provision, the new university will move “good” MEDUNSA to “great” Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University. We must ask ourselves: Can we achieve this breakthrough and reach greatness in building this new university? I believe we can!

The time is ripe to innovate and make the South African dream of greatness come true, just like Xi Jingping, now the Chinese head of state, advocated when addressing Chinese students studying abroad in 2013. He urged them to integrate their patriotic love and their aspiration to make the country stronger with their actions to serve their country, and to link their dreams with the stunning efforts of their fellow citizens to turn the Chinese Dream into reality (“Governance of China” 2014, page 63). We, the Sefako Makgatho University community and our partners, have an opportunity to rise to the challenge of using our collective aspirations to make this university one of the best in designing and contributing to quality health services for all in this country.

As the national health insurance is built, this university community must be counted among the architects of the collective dream of South Africans to have a well-functioning health system staffed by highly competent health professionals armed with scientific knowledge to invent new treatments, new assistive technology, assess technology, innovate models of quality service design, provision and financing. As Jingpin said to the students, “innovation is the soul of a nation’s progress, the inexhaustible force driving a country’s prosperity.” (page 65). The university will introduce a programme qualification mix that includes biomedical technology, biomedical engineering, clinical technology, health administration and law, information technology, prosthetics and orthotics, health promotion and disease prevention, food safety and national health insurance. This new interdisplinary programme will give students the springboard for innovation in the health sector. The country will come to depend on you, our future graduates, to solve old challenges with new technology and social innovations.

The students at this university together with the work force will prosper in an environment that is fertile with opportunities created by its leaders. The work of Richard Barrett, the value driven architect of successful organizations, is relevant here. We need to groom leaders as well as encourage current ones to demonstrate ...

\* An ability to create enabling environments for themselves and those they lead

\*  A desire to build a caring culture that engenders genuine employee, student, supplier and shareholder loyalty

\* A drive to a high performance culture that creates confidence and pride in the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University

\* Accountability and responsibility, and a commitment to encourage personal growth in others

\* A sense of purpose, a mission and the ability to create a vision of a future that is inspiring to others and engenders trust

\* The ability to actualize that vision through collaborative strategic alliances with external partnerships;

\* And finally, the commitment to align the needs of this university with those of the nation, humanity and the planet.

Yes, we are capable of producing these leaders. Certainly not by taking away for ourselves those already doing a sterling job in other universities in South Africa. For, if we did that, we would compromise other universities in our country when skills are scarce. We must create our own leaders who will adhere to our values. We must grow our own timber!

Since the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Nzimande proclaimed in a government gazette in May 2014 that Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University would be born in January 2015, and appointed an interim council, a flurry of activities were initiated to ensure the success of today:

* An Interim Management was appointed
* A development framework outlining the kind of institution we would like to see, as well as a Master plan were prepared and submitted separately to the Department of Higher Education and Training
* A feasibility study was conducted and presented to the Department of Higher Education and Training and later to the National Treasury
* Funding was made available to establish the university
* We partnered with Johns Hopkins University to offer courses in public health
* We designed a course on national health insurance
* We also outlined a curriculum on Humanities in the health sciences
* A process for the transfer of the various plots of land under MEDUNSA’s control into the name of SMU has begun
* An interim senate has been established and is up and running
* An Interim Institutional Forum was established
* An international advisory committee was established with membership from South Africa, Uganda, Thailand, the United States and Brazil. The first meeting has been held  and the committee had some very constructive comments to strengthen the proposed strategic plan. The interim council is optimistic about the positive role this eminent body can play in advancing the great aspirations of the university.
* Finally, a permanent Council is about to be appointed, with public advertisments made for men and women able to carry forward the university’s development.

These efforts have culminated in the registration of a total of 5 144 students this year at SMU. Of these, 4 133 students are registered for undergraduate programmes in the four Schools of Medicine, Health Care Sciences, Pathology and Pre-Clinical Sciences and Oral Health Sciences. The remaining 1 008 are registered as post-graduate students. The university is well on its way to registering 7 000 students in 2019 and at least 10 000 students by 2024.

The challenge will be finding suitably qualified educators to teach the new program qualification mix that will include, for example, training engineers in clinical engineering, training technicians in biotechnology, and training medical doctors in orthotics. This is where creativity is needed. The country does not have persons with doctoral degrees in these interdisciplinary areas, hence we have to grow our own timber. We are requesting the government to make substantial funding available to send more than 20 persons with doctorates to the best institutions in the world to train them so that we can open and initiate these new programs in the qualification mix by next year, in February 2016.

Our plans for the next five years are embodied in the draft strategic goals, which will be refined by the new council. These goals are to:

* Enhance faculty by providing skills and support
* Achieve excellence in teaching
* Promote high quality student selection
* Facilitate student access
* Invest in student success
* Advance research and knowledge production
* Ensure financial sustainability by raising external funding through short courses and research grants as well as endowments
* Maintain a high level of governance to ensure accountability of financial resources
* Build physical infrastructure for accommodation, learning and service provision
* Improve the electrical supply system and install a new telephone system.

We are on the way to meeting some of these goals. We have started construction of the pharmacy building, appointed a service provider to build accommodation for 205 residents

We have high expectations of this university. We expect to spend most of our time working towards our collective vision and gathering our collective brains and strengths to make this university the best in producing highly qualified and passionate professionals who are capable of improving the quality of health service provision.

We look with envy when citizens of our country go beyond the call of duty to save lives. In acknowledging his deep appreciation for the American men and women who showed unparalleled courage to stem the tide of Ebola, President Obama said: “Driven by their sense of duty and a commitment to serving a cause greater than themselves, public health professionals rose to the challenge at home and abroad and turned the tide of an epidemic. They demonstrated what is possible when America leads and when we make policy based on sound science and good judgment.” We sincerely hope that as we face similar challenges of communicable diseases, such as HIV and TB including drug resistant TB, our students will be in the forefront of using science to curb the spread of these epidemics, thus offering our own President the opportunity to recognise your extraordinary efforts.

With the support of the shareholders-*Re-invigorate*  the government, the Minister of Higher Education and Training, The Minister of Health, the external stakeholders, the staff, students, unions and the communities where training will take place, we are confident that we will achieve the strategic goals set and make Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University a world class institution.