



Community Engagement Newsletter



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Faculty of Veterinary Science | Spring: 2024

Faculty hosts unique community engagement seminar

On 16 September 2024 the faculty hosted a special community engagement seminar to showcase the various community engagement projects and activities happening across the different departments within the faculty.

The event was opened by the Deputy Dean for Teaching and Learning, Prof Rhoda Leask, who stated that community engagement was an integral part of teaching and learning at the faculty. She encouraged everyone to be actively involved in community engagement at the faculty as the university is part of the community. Dr Alfred Kgasi, who acts as the Community Engagement Coordinator within faculty, said, "Community engagement should be about co-creation of knowledge between the university and the community, ensuring mutually beneficial outcomes."

He mentioned that universities must work together with communities as equal partners where the learner becomes the teacher and the teacher becomes the learner. Dr Quixi Sonntag, who was the guest speaker, emphasised the importance of community empowerment through capacity building, partnerships and seeding of new businesses. Several presentations were made from various departments showcasing stellar projects in which great efforts were done in partnering with communities in a participatory manner.

The faculty is proud to have created this platform for showcasing achievements and also encouraging other staff members in embracing community engagement within the faculty. Community-engaged research enables external communities and social partners to collaborate with academic researchers to produce knowledge that is used for the benefit of the community as well as the researcher.



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The presentations made on the day, reflected on how the departments through their engagements with communities resulted in holistic, collaborative and sustainable empowerment. Some of the star projects that were presented on the day were:

- The small-scale livestock farmer training project in the North-West and Limpopo Province (Dept of Production Animal Studies)
- Role of OVAH satellite clinics in Mnisi and Mamelodi (Dept of Companion Animal Studies)
- Educational community outreach projects (Department Paraclinical Studies)
- Mnisi "One Health" initiatives (Dept of Veterinary Tropical Diseases)

- Physiological constraints in small scale poultry farming (Dept of Anatomy and Physiology)
- Several community outreach projects by OPVSC, VetSCO and OPGSA

Overall, it was acknowledged that community engagement involved integration of community-based approaches in the curriculum of a formal academic programme. It was also highlighted during discussions that community partners should ideally be involved in the formulation of research questions and feedback should be provided to communities on completion of research projects. In conclusion, the seminar was highly successful and it was announced that there was an intention to hold the event annually.

RABIES AWARENESS MONTH: UP vet science students conduct rabies vaccination drive

In collaboration with the North West's Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, the University of Pretoria's (UP) Faculty of Veterinary Science recently embarked on a four-day rabies vaccination campaign in various villages in the Hammanskraal area, north of Pretoria.

This community campaign was carried out in light of Rabies Awareness Month, which is observed in South Africa every September, with World Rabies Day being commemorated annually on 28 September.

These occasions aim to raise awareness about rabies prevention, empower less privileged communities and highlight the progress that has been made in defeating this disease. Access to primary animal health services in South Africa remains limited and inadequate, and is influenced by societal factors such as income inequality and spatial disparities. The grim reality is that the prevalence of rabies is linked to poverty and low socio-economic conditions.

The Hammanskraal initiative involved third-year veterinary students (BVSC 3) who vaccinated dogs and cats as part of the Veterinary Professional Life module, the core objective of which is to introduce students to the practice of community engagement in real life and the application of critical veterinary communication skills. The One Health, One Welfare concept is applied practically in the context of a community engagement activity, where the skills learnt in this and previous modules are applied. The students were divided into four groups, which visited different sites each day during the programme.

Dr Alfred Kgasi, lecturer and community engagement coordinator in UP's Faculty of Veterinary Science, together with local animal health technicians oversaw the execution of the



project. More than 450 dogs were vaccinated against rabies during the four-day campaign, as were 630 head of cattle against black quarter disease and anthrax.

UP students had a great time interacting with pet owners, providing information about rabies control and general pet care. They learned to communicate effectively with community members and learnt more about the challenges of limited access to veterinary services in South Africa. The vaccination of dogs and cats has positively contributed in boosting herd immunity against rabies within Hammanskraal communities, thus assisting in curbing this deadly disease.

Bridging the gap: One Health Project 2024

Monde Mzamani (VetSCO) and Lungile Mkhabela (Health House)

On July 27, 2024, the Melusi community in Pretoria West received a very unique and comprehensive healthcare outreach initiative.

The initiative was hosted by the veterinary student community outreach house (VetSCO) and Onderstepoort veterinary student committee (OPVSC) and the Tuks Friends of MSF (student society representing doctors without borders). The annual One Health Project took a significant leap forward this year by incorporating a multidisciplinary approach to health care. Thus, this initiative successfully provided a wider range of basic health screenings for community members, veterinary care for pets and educational resources to the local community.

The One Health concept emphasises the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health. Previously, this project involved medical students providing primary health screenings to community members while veterinary students screened and vaccinated pets. Therefore, this year's project expanded to include students from various health sciences disciplines, mirroring the multidisciplinary environment in which healthcare professionals operate in real-world settings.

The project saw the involvement of students from dentistry, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, sports science, nursing, clinical associate programs, dietetics, radiography, and medical students. Each discipline brought its unique expertise to the table, offering comprehensive services at different stations set up for community members.

Community members were registered on arrival with nursing students taking and interpreting vital signs, and providing an essential baseline for further assessments. Clinical associate students conducted medical history interviews, followed by thorough physical examinations. Dental hygiene and dental students provided oral screenings and education on maintaining oral health. Occupational therapy students demonstrated assisted living devices and taught emergency splinting techniques.

Meanwhile, sports science students ran a kiddies station, keeping the children active and engaged with games promoting wellness. Radiography students facilitated a Cancer Awareness station, educating participants about the warning signs of common cancers, including breast and prostate cancer.

The dietetics station focused on nutritional assessments and offered practical advice on maintaining a healthy diet. On the other hand, veterinary students provided client and pet registration, history-taking, and physical examinations, deworming and vaccinations. At the last station, pet owners were given free pet food donated by Montego pet food and dog beds.

Community Engagement and Impact

The project was hosted at Melusi Holistic Health Care Clinic, an ideal setting to promote healthcare knowledge among community members. The One Health Project made it possible for them to access these basic services on a Saturday, a day when most could attend without conflicting with work obligations. The project also addressed a significant concern: the fear of discovering health issues, which often leads to avoidance of screenings. The event emphasised the importance of prevention and early detection, educating the community on how proactive health management can prevent future complications. All health alerts were identified during the screenings were followed up with referral letters to nearby hospitals and clinics, ensuring that participants could take the necessary steps to address any potential health issues.

Looking Ahead: Opportunities for Improvement

The Melusi community initiative was a resounding success, demonstrating the power of a multidisciplinary approach to healthcare. The impact of this outreach was evident in the positive feedback received from the students and the community. They appreciated the opportunity to receive health care and education that addressed both human and animal needs in a single setting. Meanwhile, the students involved gained hands-on experience and a greater appreciation for the collaborative efforts which also fostered a collaborative spirit among future healthcare and veterinary professionals. This initiative serves as a model for holistic community outreach, one that truly embodies the One Health concept.



SPECIAL THANKS TO:

- Mr Kenny Mafala (Site manager of COSUP) and SAPRIN.
- Dr Elizna Boag (Montego Pet Nutrition) for donated pet food and Dr Jean-Pierre.
- Lungile Mkhabela, Naledi Moneke and Monde Mzamani for coordinating this project

St Camillus primary school community engagement

As we close the month of August in commemoration of Woman's Month, the Onderstepoort Postgraduate Student Association (OP-PGSA) from the Faculty of Veterinary Science joined hands with Sanlam/Spectroplan BlueStar to make a meaningful impact and change the lives of young girls at St Camillus Primary School in Hammanskraal.



Research by the Stellenbosch University's Law Clinic highlighted that approximately 30% of schoolgirls stay absent from school during their menstruation period due to the unaffordability of sanitary products. This absenteeism leads to loss of essential schoolwork which becomes difficult to catch up on thus affecting their grades and sometimes resulting in school dropouts. This in turn creates a huge vacuum in the later stages in work places especially in higher positions in companies, hence there is a huge gap with women in science. Nurturing schoolkids while they are still at this stage creates small steps in the direction of bridging the STEM gap and will go a long way in creating women leaders for tomorrow. The OP PGSA identified high-quality reusable cloth sanitary pads from Palesa Pads. These pads come in various packages and sizes to cater for all menstrual flow types. They offer comfortability, are odor-free and can significantly reduce menstrual cramps due to the absence of toxic chemicals. Moreover, they are leak-free, easy to wash and can be used up to five years.

With the help of our sponsors, the dream of keeping a girl child in school became a reality. A total of 86 girls from St Camillus Primary School each received Flo kits and participated in an educational session about hygiene and menstrual cycles. This initiative is a small but significant step towards bridging the gender inequality gap and, in the long run, contributing to the alleviation of poverty. Education is key to unlocking many doors and through this initiative, we align ourselves with several Sustainable Development Goals, including no poverty, zero hunger, quality education, gender equality, and reduced inequality. A very big thank you goes to Sanlam/Spectroplan BlueStar for making this dream a reality. The educational outreach extended beyond the girls, with the boys receiving enlightening talks about drug abuse, peer pressure, and gender-based violence (GBV), thanks to the invaluable contributions of Mr. Jack Manamela and Mr. Themba Raselalome.

We also extend our heartfelt thanks to Dr. Tedson Nkoana from Future Africa University of Pretoria, for his One-Health educational materials and support throughout this initiative. A huge shoutout to Andrea White for her menstrual education info sheets—check her out at @ovathemoon and andreadwhite.co.

