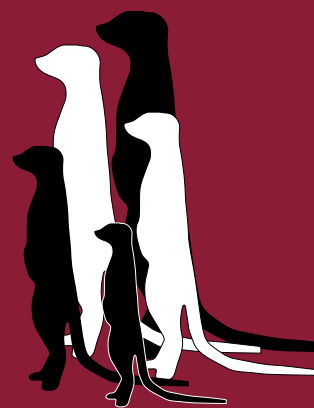




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# The Meerkat

Official newsletter of the OPVSC



For the students, by the students

Issue 3.1: Autumn 2022

## The Wellness Issue

*Words: Christiaan Bronkhorst*

Whether we're studying Veterinary Nursing, or Veterinary Medicine, we're studying at one of the most competitive undergraduate faculties on the continent. It's fair to say that we all feel the pressure to perform well academically, with some of us often working into the early hours of the morning.

But we're human beings — sometimes we just want to take a nap, or hang out with some friends, or enjoy a little bit of Netflix & Chill. Should we feel guilty about taking time off from our academic work just to, well, have fun?

After all, aren't we the very privileged few who made it into OP? Isn't our desire for a bit of a break just another Gen-Z first world problem?

### **To that we say: Nonsense!**

Although we are indeed fortunate to be where we are, that alone does not negate the fact that we, as humans, have social and emotional needs that must be met.

In fact, it is this highly destructive train of thought that leads to the high rates of burnout experienced by students and young veterinary professionals.

As we focus on the wellbeing of veterinary students and professionals during this part of the year, it's vital once again to emphasise that we need



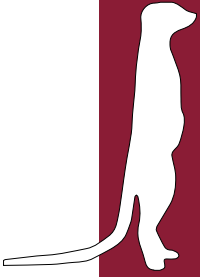
*First-World Problems? No, argues the Meerkat*

to find the right work-life balance. Not only is a life dedicated solely to academic studies unsustainable in the long term, but by spending a little more of your time on recreation you are more likely to perform well in your academic work.

It's important to find activities that allow you to blow off some steam in a healthy constructive way. For many, that includes exercising regularly. Research studies over several years have shown a direct correlation between regular exercise and good mental health, so do consider getting in some exercise if you don't already.

Humans are also creative creatures and finding a positive outlet for the creative urge is essential. It can be as simple as gardening or taking care of some plants in the windowsill of your res room. Others choose to write (and if this is you, please get in touch with us); others still prefer painting or drawing or performing some kind of craft.

This author likes to build and paint tiny 28mm models: focusing on the building and painting allows the mind to relax and forget other problems. An added advantage is the manual dexterity gained by working with such small items. *(Cont. p. 2)*



## From the Editors:

### *The MEERKAT Lives!*

Since the Covid pandemic hit in 2020, the Meerkat — the official newsletter of the OPVSC — went into hibernation.

We are proud to announce that the little fellow has decided once more to scamper out of his burrow and share news, opinions, and images of life at OP.

With this time of the year being dedicated to Veterinary Mental Health, and after two years of living with the Coronavirus pandemic, the focus of our first post-hibernation issue is on student wellness.

Inside you'll find discussions about work-life balance, mental health, and living (and studying) with Long Covid. You'll also get a chance to meet the members of the 2022 OPVSC, and to see some snapshots from OP life.

Since the Meerkat has just awoken from his slumber, the team working on the paper is small. We would love for more keen artists, writers, or photographers to join us.

#### - The Editorial Team

Jayna Kessa  
Kreshalia "Cow" Ephraim  
Thanushka Gounden  
Chris "corpus canis"  
Bronkhorst

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**Consulting editor**  
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(cont. from p. 1)

Humans are also social creatures. We shouldn't forget that. It's perfectly healthy to have a drink with friends occasionally. Of course, one shouldn't overdo it either. Here the "Drinking Culture" that many have reported experiencing in residences becomes more destructive than beneficial. It should be noted that excess drinking exacerbates depression and anxiety in the long run.

It's all good and well to pay lip-service to work-life balance, but how does one actually manage to achieve that? For some, it may be useful to plan out a weekly calendar in advance, making sure to block off free time that is dedicated to fun activities. I'd suggest freeing up at least an hour or two a day to get some exercise in and have

some "me time". The Faculty Student Advisor or a Peer Advisor is available to help, should you be struggling with time-management.

It must also be said that if you are struggling with wellness issues, the longer you wait to address them, the more severe they become. OP offers counselling from a dedicated psychologist — so make use of that resource if you need it.

Below you'll find the contact information for all of the Wellness and Support resources available at OP. We urge anyone who has need of these resources to make use of them — we're incredibly fortunate to have access to dedicated wellness support at OP.



## OP WELLNESS & SUPPORT DETAILS



**Campus Clinic details: ATB 1-47**  
**Nurse:** (No appointment needed)  
**Monday, Tuesday & Thursday** 08:00 - 15:30  
Tel: 012 529 8243

**Doctor (In Person): Thursday:** 12:30 - 14:30 (Request an Appointment with the Nurse in person or via call 012 529 8243 or email info.shs@up.ac.za  
You may go in without an appointment if there is an emergency or slots available)

**OP Psychologist:**  
carin.huhn@up.ac.za  
**SADAG:** 0800 456 789  
**24-hour UP careline:**  
0800 747 747

**Faculty Student Advisor:**  
teballo.riba@up.ac.za  
**Peer Advisor:**  
vet.peer.advisor@gmail.com

**OP Library:** Monday - Friday | 08:00 - 16:00

**Social Media:**  
**IG:** @opwellness | **FB:** OP Wellness Community

**Student Wellness Rep: Jean-Pierre Chitter**  
076 286 1888 | jeanpierrechitter.opvsc@gmail.com

# This is Hard.

Words: Kreshalia "Cow" Ephraim



*Sometimes, you just gotta take that nap...*

As someone who has grown up in a culture where mental health is seen as trivial, and is often stigmatised, it's ironic that I chose this topic. I barely understand the basics of it, or what it means in the context of studying this degree, which ultimately made dealing with my TOX300 mark that much more difficult. I'm sure we can all relate to struggling with this module in particular.

Even though it seems like the end of our world – no, this isn't dramatic, because it does feel like the end of the world when you see red on ClickUP – it isn't the end of the world. It's just another step to the learning process, and it's another step to the common goal we all share: graduating. However, if graduating is your only goal instead of one of them, it may be time to re-evaluate your future.

***"I left the test venue laughing, thinking this was a fever dream I was sure to wake from. Spoiler: it wasn't."***

I remember studying and preparing for it so well that there was nothing else I could have done to prepare myself more. I went into that test venue feeling confident and relaxed because surely, I had this in the bag.

Upon reading one of the first questions, I was completely baffled. I couldn't even understand what was being asked, let alone what I was supposed to answer with. I left the test venue laughing, thinking this was a fever dream I was sure to wake from. Spoiler: it wasn't.

This happens too often to too many of us, but does that mean we'll graduate to be horrible nurses or vets? No.

So, don't be hard on yourself. Don't beat yourself up for something that is not in your control. Maybe you need to change your study method, or maybe you shouldn't have watched all 8 episodes of Bridgerton three days before the test.

You are a human being, and it is physically impossible to work 24/7. You need the sunshine on your skin; you need that cup of tea with a friend; and, yes, you do need to support the Rugby boys' and girls' matches.

According to the World Health Organisation, mental health is defined as the "state of well-being in which an individual realizes their own abilities,

can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to his or her community". This seems so simple. All you really have to do or be is a well-rounded person and contribute to your community. Then, why do we struggle so much? Why do we find it hard to get out of bed sometimes?

Every week is hard. Let me say that again: every week is hard. In our degrees, it feels like there's always studying to do, lectures to catch up on, and if it isn't work, it's the extra curriculums we're a part of. Things simply do not get easier, and that's why taking care of your mental health is so imperative.

It's a statistic that men are more likely to drink alcohol or take drugs than talk about their feelings as a coping mechanism. From my observations, I don't believe that this statistic can only be applied to men. Now, this isn't me saying drinking or taking drugs is bad. I fully believe in the "live your best life, bestie" campaign. This is me saying there are other – and better – ways to cope with stress, anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation.

Talking about your issues may seem daunting, but it's also the first step to getting the help you need and deserve. If you are struggling, and don't know who to turn to, there are people at OP that are willing to put in the time and effort to get you where you want and need to be. It's normal to struggle, but it's also normal to seek guidance.

I mean, you wouldn't stay silent if you got stabbed or tore a muscle; you would go and get help. Similarly, you should not suffer in silence about your mental health.

So, in this new quarter of the semester: reach out when you need to; take a break; and never give up on yourself, because there are people rooting for you, including me. At the end of the day, all we want for each other is the best, so let's help one another out so that it's #notonemorevet in order for us to vibe and thrive.

# Covid Getting Long in the Tooth?

Words: Christiaan Bronkhorst

It's been more than two years since President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the start of Lockdown in South Africa. Optimistic hopes for a swift end to the Covid pandemic and the measures used to contain it were dashed, despite the rollout of the first vaccines in South Africa last year.

It's been two years of curfews, lockdowns, mask-wearing, greater distancing from other people, sickness, death.

I think it's fair to say we're all *gatvol*. Even if you and your loved ones were lucky enough not to contract the disease, the restrictions on public life alone must have chafed. Yet even as the National State of Disaster has been lifted, and it seems things are beginning to return to normal, the effects of the pandemic remain.

I think first of those South Africans who have lost loved ones; those who have lost their livelihoods; those who have missed out on years of normal living. But I wish to discuss those who contracted the disease and are living with the effects of Long Covid.

Admittedly, my interest in Long Covid is personally motivated. Both my mother and I contracted the disease in the May of last year. She became cyanotic and spent five weeks in hospital and another two months recuperating at home on oxygen.

I was luckier and escaped hospitalisation (although perhaps only because in the throes of fever I was too worried about who would feed my cat, despite my own O<sub>2</sub>-sats dropping to the 70s).

We were fortunate to survive. Too many people were not. However the disease left us with multiple chronic health issues — those characteristic of Long Covid. According to the WHO, these symptoms include "...fatigue, shortness of breath, cognitive dysfunction but also others which generally have an impact on everyday functioning".

In my own case, apart from the crippling effects of chronic fatigue, I struggled enormously with memory problems. Initially it was so severe I forgot the words of everyday objects or would get so anxious about forgetting my car keys somewhere that it felt like my cervical arteries were almost popping. Of course, the memory and anxiety issues were detrimental to my studies. How could I expect to remember what the masseter muscle looked like when half the time I couldn't even remember what I did two minutes ago?

After some weeks, I realised that the problems weren't going to go away by themselves. I had to get pro-active and do something about it. I had to say "Screw Covid. I won't let it beat me." So I met with my wonderful GP and we hatched a cunning plan: I needed to find the right medication in the short term to improve my symptoms, while in the longer term working on the Covid-related physical and mental health issues.

Now, I must confess that my BCS leans more towards the chonker end of the spectrum. I hadn't been looking after my physical health as much as I should have been.



*"Screw Covid. I won't let it beat me."*

So I began seeing a biokineticist to work on that aspect of wellbeing. As someone, who by nature is not positively disposed to the idea of exercise, I was gobsmacked at how quickly I began to see improvements in my energy levels and my mood.

At the same time I realised that I needed to get the right help to address my mental and psychological wellbeing.

Going through the Covid experience is incredibly stressful, more so if you come close to or, heavens forbid, actually lose a loved one. So I got back in touch with a therapist I had seen before and we began working on resolving these issues.

After about a year since we contracted the disease, I can see genuine improvements to my health. I'm still not 100%, but I am getting better day by day. Recovery can be long and sometimes disheartening, but it you decide, truly decide, that you wish to get as well as possible, and take the steps to do so, you will see results in time. Covid has left all of us with scars of one form or another.

I would encourage anyone that is still struggling with the effects of the disease to get help. With some motivation and the right assistance you really can change your life for the better.

[Editors: see p. 2 for more information about the excellent student-wellness resources available at OP]

# Throw a Dog a Bone

*Words: Meerkat Staff, with assistance from BIG*



*Anyone Got a Treat?*

*Tyriq Timul (BVScIII) getting hands on with an OP Beagle. Photo courtesy of Mr Timul.*

During the practical components of our coursework, we students frequently come into contact with the OP Beagles. As anyone who's attended these practical

sessions know, the Beagles absolutely love the attention and the interaction with humans. Because we're in "clinical mode" during the practicals, we can often forget about the personality behind the beagle, seeing the dog as more of a "medical specimen".

The fact remains that the OP Beagles have the need to interact in a positive, rewarding, and non-clinical way with human beings. As part of the duty of care we all owe to the OTAU animals, it's important that we remember to look after the emotional wellbeing of our animals. This is where the Beagle Interest Group (BIG) comes in. BIG allows students to take the beagles for a walk around campus or for an off-leash run and play session in the dog park. All students need to do is engage with the Beagles – BIG provides all the equipment needed to do so.

The Beagles absolutely love the attention from students, with individual dogs often becoming very attached to the students that regularly take them for walks. It can make a massive difference to the quality of life of a beagle that hasn't been walked or taken out of its kennel for a while, to have a student spend some quality time with them.

But the benefits aren't only to the Beagles. The benefits to human mental and physical wellbeing of an active session engaged in playing with the dogs are well known. This is One Health in action! By spending some quality time with the beagles, you're also engaging in activities that improve your own mood and provide a healthy outlet for stress. So take the time to leave your books and walk a Beagle — both you yourself and the dog will thank you.

# We can haz cuddlezz??

*Words: Meerkat Staff, with assistance from CIG*

If you're more of a cat person, or just want a fuzzy lap-warmer for the coming winter, why not volunteer to be a kitten fosterer with the OP Cat Interest Group (CIG)?

Every year CIG takes in a number of stray and feral kittens and fosters them with a student. This year has been a record-setting year for the number of fosters taken in by CIG. By socialising these kittens from a young age, CIG hopes to make the kittens more attractive to potential adoptees. CIG also has a sterilisation programme and a programme to see to the medical needs of stray cats.

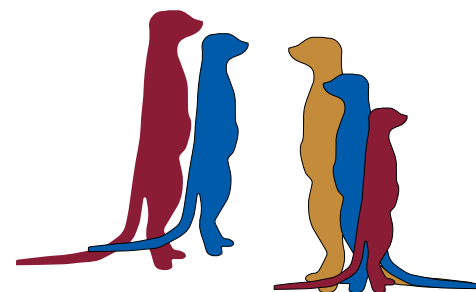
Through fostering a kitten, you'll get to experience the love and companionship provided by them, while also socialising them towards people and making them more adoptable. CIG provides all the food and equipment a fosterer needs, so you can focus on giving that special kitten the love and attention it deserves. If you're unable to foster a kitten, you can help in other ways. With winter coming up, CIG is in need of help: donations of warm blankets, towels, food and water bowls, as well as hot water bottles and heating pads would be of tremendous value in helping them achieve their goals. Donations can also be made to CIG's account at



*Photo courtesy of Georgina Agar, CIG*

the OPVAH, to assist in paying for the costs of sterilisation and medical care. So far this year, CIG has had 75 kittens in their care, of whom an astounding 41 have already been adopted and are getting all the cuddlezz they demand.

For enquiries about donations to CIG, please contact:  
Nicola Anderson  
nixi.anderson@gmail.com



# Meerkat Meets:

Words: Meerkat Staff

Pictures: Jayna Kessa



## Thulani Saizi: Chairperson

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Mr Chairperson or otherwise known as Doctor. In his spare time you may catch him making cool sticker emojis and avatars or learning a new instrument. He's responsible for advising and supervising the OPVSC, as well as liaising with Faculty, UP's SRC, and the SAVC. **Contact: thulanisaizi2@gmail.com**

## Jayna Kessa: Vice-Chairperson, Community Engagement, and Social Media

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This is the face behind the social media posts. A safe conclusion about her is that she will probably die petting something she shouldn't have. She also enjoys painting and drawing in her spare time. Her duties include looking after the general wellness of the OPVSC, and maintaining its social medial presence. She also handles aspects of Community Engagement. **Contact: jaynakessa@gmail.com**



## Alex Jordaan: Academic Representative

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Alex has extra hours in the day where he absorbs knowledge. Alex is the academic rep and the academic in our group. He is known for bending backwards to assist any student right till the end, anyone that knows him can agree he is an absolute star. Alex is involved in organising Faculty mentorship programmes, the election of class and module representatives, and facilitating a resolution to students' academic concerns.

**Contact: Alexjordaan.opvsc@gmail.com.** Fun fact - He would take pizza to the grave and his favorite module is GOP

## Nnaishi Monyeki: Treasurer and Secretary

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Meet Nnaishi: he controls all the admin and money so we prefer to be in his good books. [Editor's note: We love you Nnaishi]. As Secretary, he carries out the day-to-day administrative duties of the OPVSC and as Treasurer he draws up the budgets for the OPVSC and processes the transfer of funds.

**Contact: nnaishiopvsc@gmail.com**



## Nicola Jacobs: Hospital Representative

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This is a real-life superwoman. Meet Nicola, a 5th year clinic student. Yes, SHE IS IN CLINICS AND ON OPVSC. She acts as the liaison between veterinary students on clinical rotation, the OPVSC, and Faculty. **Contact: njacobs.opvsc@gmail.com**

# The 2022 OPVSC Team



## Simphiwe Gamedze: Transformation Representative

“I’ll transform it” - Simphiwe. Legend has it that if you recite those words 3 times, your world will automatically be brighter because Simphiwe will arrive, and her presence will just brighten your life and put a smile on your face. Simphiwe addresses the difficult stuff: student resources, financial aid, language policy, and issues of discrimination and bullying.  
**Contact: [simphiweOPVSC2022@gmail.com](mailto:simphiweOPVSC2022@gmail.com)**

## Darina Basson: Nurse Representative

On any occasion you can find Darina nursing around. Not only is she well known for her amazing taste in music - she is the most caring and loving OPVSC /OP student you’ll ever meet! She serves on the BVetNurs Committee and assists Alex in maintaining Faculty mentorship programmes. **Contact: [darina.opvsc@gmail.com](mailto:darina.opvsc@gmail.com)**



## Brown Mphali: Clubs, Sports, Societies

If you find him, please let us know. We can never find him (at camp /meetings /in general) but when he does return, he makes sure to glue the team together and ensure everyone is doing okay. He liaises with the chairpersons of OP’s Clubs and Societies, coordinates and facilitates OPVSC sports teams, and arranged Societies Day.  
**Contact: [brown.mphali@gmail.com](mailto:brown.mphali@gmail.com)**

## Jean-Pierre Chitter: Wellness Representative

If you are from OP - then you definitely know JP. He’s always everywhere and everywhere always. He is in charge of Wellness, this is a super important portfolio. Keep JPs contact info saved - he will magically make you well again. JP pursues programmes related to student wellness, including the activities of the Wellness Subcommittee. He facilitates Therapeutic Tuesdays and Wellness Day events throughout the year. **Contact: [jeanpierrechitter.opvsc@gmail.com](mailto:jeanpierrechitter.opvsc@gmail.com)**. Fun fact - He would take all the lemons to the grave and his favorite module is VRP



## Tayla Hellyer: Community Engagement, Social and culture

The most social in our group, believe it or not. She is just serving on OPVSC until her acceptance letter from Ms South African arrives. She coordinates all of the Faculty’s social and cultural events, including Hawaiian and Med VS Vet.  
**Contact: [taylahellyer.opvsc@gmail.com](mailto:taylahellyer.opvsc@gmail.com)**

# OP at Play

Curated by Thanushka Gounden





**Photos courtesy of:**

Luchelle Houndsome  
Bianca Pretorius  
Cybill Robertson  
Bianca Pretorius  
Luchelle Houndsome  
Cybill Robertson  
Leshan Pillay



**The Meerkat Overhears:**

VPH 200 lecture: "I just realised that apoptosis means that we die a little inside every day."