

Faculty of Veterinary Science's Faculty Day showcases high-level research

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Prof Darrell Abernethy, Dean of the Faculty of Veterinary Science with Prof Lucille Blumberg, Deputy Director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases

The Faculty of Veterinary Science's annual Faculty Day has once again proved to be one of the highlights of the Faculty's calendar. It provided an opportunity to showcase high-level research outputs and provided researchers with a chance to share their high-level research with peers, colleagues and students. The event was also attended by veterinary pharmaceutical companies who displayed and exhibited their products. A definite highlight of the event was the Sir Arnold Theiler Memorial Lecture presented by Prof Lucille Blumberg, Deputy Director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, a division of the National Health Laboratory Service.

The Dean of the Faculty, Prof Darrell Abernethy delivered the welcoming address in which he emphasised the need for the Faculty to continuously keep track of and position itself with regard to new advances in technology and the ever-changing global and local environment which increasingly poses challenges for the environment in the form of emerging diseases, poverty and the interactions among humans, wildlife and production animals.

He said that more inroads must be made in the areas of conservation, poverty alleviation, food security and the prevention of diseases with a view to improving economic sustainability. The immediate challenge facing the Faculty is determining how the institution can thrive and operate in such an environment. With this in mind, the Faculty needs to excel in its research through focussed research areas, more national and international collaborations, conferences, and an increase in citations and research publications. The Faculty's research must also be relevant to the needs of South Africa and Africa, while at the same time being recognised for what it is doing.

In order to accomplish this, undergraduate and postgraduate student training must be at the heart of teaching and learning and must be honed to fit the challenges of the current veterinary and economic environment by identifying key research focus areas and strengthening the Faculty's existing ones. Prof Abernethy stressed the continued engagement with government to address certain identified needs – in particular, issues such as food security, poverty alleviation and antimicrobial resistance. It is crucial to ensure that government and the Faculty are on the same track, even if this means that the Faculty increasingly has to shift its focus towards issues of national importance.



Prof Lucille Blumberg delivered the Sir Arnold Theiler Memorial lecture entitled 'One Health: a decade of shared experiences and benefits'. While One Health is an essential research focus area in the Faculty's strategic plan, her presentation was of particular relevance to the veterinary profession. She described combined projects that have been initiated to look at the prevalence of zoonoses in potentially highly-exposed humans at the animal/human health interface. As an active practitioner of One Health, Prof Blumberg has worked closely with animal practitioners in the prevention and management of outbreaks

and cases of avian influenza, Rift Valley fever, rabies and the Zika virus, as well as in the investigation of possible zoonoses in cases of acute febrile illness.

She referred to specific outbreaks of Rift Valley fever (2008), African tick bite fever (2012) and rabies, a focal point in KwaZulu-Natal which required intense animal control. In this regard, a One Health project was started to eliminate rabies in the province by 2013. In the case of the Rift Valley fever outbreak, important measures were introduced, such as a government-assisted immunisation project, health worker education and community awareness programmes. Although a large number of farmers were affected, the disease was later eradicated in the affected areas. Further control with regard to all these diseases included contract tracing and monitoring, and intense blood testing measures. She emphasised the critical factors of continued collaboration and communication in respect of these and similar diseases, and pointed out that in 2015 renewed prioritisation was given to the identification of pathogens that can lead to outbreaks.

The oral presentations given on the day were of a high standard. A different system for oral presentations was introduced in 2015, according to which the ten best presentations are chosen from among the Departments to be presented on Faculty Day. The presentations covered various disciplines in the field of veterinary science and ranged from research projects on companion animals, production animals and wildlife, to work in the fields of phytochemicals and vaccine-related studies. As part of the event's third session, 32 poster presentations were displayed, showcasing the wide variety of disciplines the Faculty's researchers are focussing on, including poultry, production animal studies, wildlife management and prevention of diseases (including zoonoses), companion animal clinical studies, anatomical and physiological studies, and veterinary tropical diseases.

The formal part of the day was concluded with the customary annual Faculty Day awards. The 2016 winners were as follows:

- **Researcher of the Year** – Prof Estelle Venter (Department of Veterinary Tropical Diseases)
- **Best oral presentation** – Dr Elise van der Heijden (Department of Veterinary Tropical Diseases)
- **Best poster presentation** – Dr Gareth Zeiler (Department of Paraclinical Sciences)

Nine other outstanding researchers in the Faculty were also recognised: Prof Peter Thompson, Prof Geoff Fosgate, Prof Johan Schoeman, Prof Vinny Naidoo, Prof Anita Michel, Prof Andre Ganswindt, Prof Christo Botha, Prof Amelia Goddard and Dr Dayo Fasina.

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