

Faculty showcases its CEn programme to the steering committee of the USRN

11 April 2017



The Dean of the Faculty, Prof Darrell Abernethy with Dr Eugene Machimana (left, CEn coordinator), Ms Gernia van Niekerk, UP CEn manager, Professor Angelina Yuen, Vice President of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and Chairperson of the Executive Committee of the USRN, and Dr Rebone Moerane, HOD: Production Animal Studies and Chairperson of the Faculty CEn committee

The University Social Responsibility Network (USR Network/USRN) was inaugurated on 9 October 2015 in Hong Kong. It places emphasis on collaboration, coalition and networking among members and with other networks and alliances. The University of Pretoria is one of the 14 university members worldwide and the only University in Africa.

On 11 April 2017 the steering committee of the USRN visited the Faculty of Veterinary Science as part of an in-depth fact-finding mission to the University of Pretoria which kicked off on Sunday, 9 April when the group arrived in Pretoria. Their visit provided the Faculty with the opportunity to showcase its excellent Community Engagement (CEn) programme, the core of which is part of the Faculty's curricula.





About 20 representatives attended a session during which the Dean of the Faculty, Prof Darrell Abernethy gave a welcoming presentation followed by a joint presentation by Dr Eugene Machimana and Dr Quixi Sonntag, both members of the Faculty's community engagement committee. The committee is responsible for coordinating and managing all CEn activities in the Faculty.

In his welcoming presentation Prof Abernethy explained the way the Faculty operates within the community engagement framework, a programme which forms part of the Faculty's BVSc and Diploma in Veterinary Nursing curricula. Aimed at collaboration and cooperation, Prof Abernethy emphasised the One Health concept to which the Faculty strongly subscribes and which is central to its community engagement activities and projects. "The core of the faculty's projects is based on the concept that we are living in a dynamic environment. Wildlife, farming and the ecosystem are interrelated which is something that we take cognisance of and enable us as veterinarians and researchers to better and optimally do our work", he said. Research, collaboration and cooperation do not only apply locally but extend across South Africa's borders into Africa and the rest of the world.

Dr Sonntag and Dr Machimana gave a comprehensive overview of the Faculty's CEn projects and pointed out that CEn is embedded in teaching, learning and research in the Faculty as well as the involvement of all departments in these activities. It is the responsibility of the CEn committee, chaired by Dr Rebone Moerane (HOD: Department of Production Animal Studies) to oversee the more than 60 projects, to be aware of those activities and to see that they are properly integrated in the curriculum programme. They highlighted the Faculty's clinical and research based CEn projects which mainly consist of the Mnisi Community Programme where final year students annually spend time doing clinical rotations; the Hluvukani Animal Health Clinic; Mamelodi Animal Health Clinic, and Makapanstad which is a rural area served by the Faculty's mobile clinics and managed by its Onderstepoort Veterinary Academic Hospital (OVAH).

Integration into the curriculum programme of the Faculty is underlined by, among others, modules such as Veterinary Professional Life (VPL 300) during which students are taught so-called ‘soft skills’ in order to be a successful veterinarian. Skills include communication skills, conflict management and project management which are applied by about 30 groups to plan their own projects and identify problems in communities in conjunction with community engagement partners such as farmers, welfare organisations, schools and the community itself. Another aim of a module such as this one is to enable students to be leaders in respect of their communities after graduation. In essence skills taught are aimed at the ability to work and communicate with communities that are often resource-poor and are not always aware of the work that is done by veterinarians.

Through Veterinary Core Practice (VCP) 601 and Veterinary Elective Practice (VEP) 601 BVSc final year students are working with people who has never been exposed to veterinary services and enable the students to work in different circumstances when community outreach is done. It also gives them exposure to animals, animal production and establishes a community engagement and development approach to these communities.

Other examples mentioned, including research based community engagement projects, were the Rust de Winter project run by the Department of Paraclinical Sciences in collaboration with the Veterinary Services of the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD) and supported by VETSCO, a student initiative. Within the One Health framework the project provides training for students without related experience with regard to bovines and small stock. The One Health concept is also manifested in the poverty stricken ZAMA-ZAMA informal settlement where the faculty’s students have partnered with students from the University’s Health Sciences faculty, and engineering and education students. In turn, the community identifies their own needs and guides the CEn committee. In this regard, students and lecturers must sometimes improvise because of difficult working circumstances.

The USRN visit was concluded with a video about the faculty’s community engagement projects after which two groups were taken on a tour of the faculty by the Dean, Prof Darrell Abernethy and the Dr Rebene Moerane, HOD of the Department of Production Animals and Chairperson of the CEn committee. Judging by questions received from the delegation they found the information provided extremely interesting and insightful, and perhaps a notion to take some of these ideas back to their own universities.

Formation of the [USR Network](#) is based on the belief that universities have the obligation to work together to address the economic, social, cultural and environmental challenges in the world and to find solutions so as to make our world more just, inclusive, peaceful and sustainable.

Further to the Second Summit on University Social Responsibility organized by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) in November 2014 in Hong Kong, it was agreed among the participating universities that a network for advancing university social responsibility (USR) shall be formed. The Secretariat of the USR Network is set up at and supported by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University in Hong Kong. Members of the visiting steering committee not only represented Hong Kong PolyU but also the University of Manchester, the University of Haifa, the University of New South Wales, Sichuan University, Washington University in St Louis, Peking University, Kyoto University, Tufts University, the Yidan Foundation and the University of São Paulo.



- Author Chris van Blerk
- Last edited by Christoffel van Blerk