

## **CENTENARY BIRTHDAY – REFERENCE TO MEDUNSA**

Mr Master of Ceremonies, Vice Chancellor, Vice Principal, Dean, members of staff, invited guests, colleagues and colleagues to be, ladies and gentlemen

It is indeed a privilege to have been invited to this celebration and to extend hearty congratulations to all and sundry who have been involved in the first 100 years of veterinary education and service in South Africa and to pay tribute to the pioneers of yesteryear who are no longer with us.

In this centenary year, it is exactly 40 years since the establishment of the Faculty of Veterinary Science at Medunsa and just more than 20 years since its amalgamation with the Onderstepoort faculty which resulted in the creation of the National Faculty of Veterinary Science as we know it today.

The Medunsa faculty has nevertheless contributed greatly to the development of veterinary education and service during its existence and is worthy of its place in the history of veterinary education and service in South Africa.

The first Dean of the Faculty, Prof. Neville Owen and his staff members were to some extent pioneers in their own right as they had to build and develop the Faculty against somewhat unfavourable odds. Making use of existing infrastructure and facilities in the established core of the University, the first five students were admitted in 1982. The Medunsa Animal Hospital was inaugurated in April/May of 1983 and a Farm Animal Production Unit in 1984 with, amongst others, a dairy unit sponsored by Smith-Kline Beecham. In 1985, an adult education programme was established with funding obtained from the K Birch Trust.

The first graduates, Drs Emily Mogajane and Griffiths Bawuti, received their degrees in 1987, the first locally trained Black veterinarians. The Faculty adopted a species approach in its curriculum in the same year with changes in the departmental structure to provide for the change. A dairy goat unit funded by Janssens was also created in 1987.

During 1992 a very successful poultry placement programme was initiated by Prof Lionel Abrams as part of the Medunsa Outreach

programme and a Community Service and Outreach Unit established in the Faculty to coordinate all the outreach activities. Under the guidance of Prof Gert Rautenbach as Acting Dean, a self evaluation report (SER) was compiled in 1992 and submitted to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons in London to obtain recognition for the BVMCh degree. It was, however, only in 2018 that recognition was eventually granted.

Another important event in 1992 was the launching of two independent investigations into veterinary education, recommendations from both being made known in 1994. Both recommended amalgamation of the Medunsa and Onderstepoort faculties which resulted in discussions and workshops between the two universities and faculties, the creation of a Joint Transitional Monitoring Committee, a Joint Implementation Committee and a Select Committee to make recommendations on all relevant matters including the development of a new curriculum.

Further discussions and exhaustive negotiations at various levels subsequently resulted in an announcement by the Minister of Education, Min Benghu, on 4 September 1997 “that the provision of veterinary science education and training that is currently offered by the Veterinary Science Faculties of the Medical University of Southern Africa (MEDUNSA) and the University of Pretoria (UP) will, with effect from 1 January 1998, be undertaken by the amalgamation of the two faculties to form a new Faculty of Veterinary Science at Onderstepoort under the guardianship of the UP.”

The physical amalgamation only took place piecemeal during 1999 with the appointment of staff between April and June and the transfer of 55 Medunsa students to the Onderstepoort campus in July. By agreement, these students completed their studies at Onderstepoort according to the rules and regulations of the BVMCh degree. The last students graduated in 2004 bringing the total number of Medunsa graduates to 143. Of these, 112 were Black, 24 Asian, 5 Brown and 2 White graduates.

The Medunsa graduates have since entered all spheres of the profession and have become important role players in policy-making, research and provision of services. One thinks of Drs. Emily Mogajane, Mike Modisane, Steve Cornelius and others in civil service, those in private practice and Dr. Charlotte Nkuna who recently completed her term of office as President of the South African Veterinary Association. A number of graduates have served on the South African Veterinary Council as members while Dr. Rebone Moerane has served as President

and Dr. Alfred Kgasi who is currently serving as President of the Council. A number of graduates have also entered academia, notably Dr. Steve Cornelius at Medunsa and Onderstepoort, Dr. Rebone Moerane as Head of the Department of Production Animal Studies and Prof. Vinny Naidoo as Director of OVARU, Deputy Dean of Research and now Dean of the National Faculty.

The rest, as they say, is history. It was a wonderful experience and a privilege to have been associated with Medunsa and its Faculty of Veterinary Science. It was truly uplifting to have shared in the vision of Prof. Francois Retief, first Rector/Principal of Medunsa who wrote in 1982 "We at Medunsa have little doubt that we are in a unique position to build bridges towards ensuring a happier South Africa of tomorrow."

Mr Dean, I would like to conclude by paying tribute to the management of Medunsa during the existence of its veterinary faculty, Prof. Neville Owen as first Dean, academic and other staff of the Faculty, its graduates and sponsors and to the memory of the Faculty of Veterinary Science of Medunsa.

May the National Faculty go from strength to strength.

I thank you and wish you a pleasant day.