

#UPMandelaMonth: UP Veterinary Science students serve rural community at animal clinic

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With the annual July commemoration of the life of former president Nelson Mandela having kicked off, a group of University of Pretoria (UP) Veterinary Science students is using their new skills to help farmers in rural areas.

Olebile Olibile and Deborah Mushwana form part of the group of final-year Veterinary Science students who offer their skills every day at the Hluvukani Animal Clinic in Mpumalanga or in the surrounding community. The students work with a variety of dogs, livestock and wildlife, providing services such as medical care. “We travel every morning to Hluvukani [from the [Hans Hoheisien Wildlife Research Station](#) in the Kruger Park], where we either work at the clinic or go into the community on call-outs to attend to a variety of animals,” Mushwana said.



The programme not only benefits farmers and the community at large but also the students involved.

Dr Andy Hentzen, Senior Lecturer at UP's [Faculty of Veterinary Science](#), is the coordinator of the clinic's outreach programme, which aims to benefit farmers and communities in rural areas. "The project is an attempt to reach out to the community and make them aware of the service that the faculty can deliver," Dr Hentzen said. "Also, the community can bring cases to meeting points where treatment is given and/or arrangements made for hospitalisation."

This programme not only benefits farmers and the community at large but also the students involved. "The clinic itself is located in an area where many South African-controlled animal diseases [any animal disease or infectious agent that is not known to occur in South Africa] occur – this has given me insight into how to deal with scenarios involving these diseases," Olibile said.



Students working at the animal clinic also work with wildlife.

"Also, by attending this rotation, my perspective has been swayed towards believing that a [One Health](#) approach [where various disciplines work together locally, nationally and globally to attain

optimal health for people, animals and the environment] is the best way to control infectious diseases that are around as a result of the challenge of securing vaccines and drugs. Many emerging infectious diseases have a zoonotic [animal-to-human transmission] potential, and the human-animal interface seems to be on the rise with the increasing popularity of pets. It is therefore important that modern-day veterinary practitioners not just look at protecting the health and well-being of the animal, but consider that of the human involved in that specific human-animal interface too.”

Being involved in this programme has special resonance for Mushwana at this time. “Mandela Month is a month during which we remember where we come from as a nation and look towards where we are going,” she said. “It’s a month to remember the sacrifices that were made for us to be a free nation; it’s to honour Madiba and to appreciate the fact that we have come a long way, without turning a blind eye to the very visible challenges in the country. It also challenges us to do our part in serving people and ensuring that there is progression and freedom.”

- Author Mecayla Maseka

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