

WEDNESDAY, MAY 13, 2009

The Chancellor's welcoming message 5 May 2009

Message from the Chancellor of the University of Pretoria, Prof Wiseman Nkuhlu at the Naming Ceremony of the Jotello F. Soga Library

Honoured guests

The Faculty of Veterinary Science on the Onderstepoort Campus is the only one of its kind in the country and a national asset. It is also the 2nd oldest of the 46 Faculties of Veterinary Science in Africa and the first in sub-Saharan Africa. Established by Sir Arnold Theiler in 1920 it has a long history of excellence in teaching and learning and it is expected in future to play a leading role in veterinary education in the SADC region and further afield in Africa.

This faculty has the sole responsibility in South Africa of training veterinarians and veterinary nurses that are essential to the country in the context of defined national and international needs.

Veterinarians and veterinary services are indispensable to the health and wellbeing of animals and humans and play an important role in the economy of South Africa. Among other things, they contribute to production of sustainable sources of safe protein of animal origin and the prevention of transmission of diseases from animals to humans. The ability to diagnose and contain diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease and to establish the risk of the transfer of diseases from animals to humans such as the current outbreak of swine flu is critical to the certification of the disease status of animals and of the safety for export of various agricultural products of animal and plant origin, and human health respectively.

With the amalgamation of the 2 faculties of the University of Pretoria and MEDUNSA in 1999 a new national Faculty of Veterinary Science was formed, to continue building on its past achievements and develop veterinarians and veterinary nurses for the future.

Facilities at this faculty are comparable to the best in the world. Today we focus on one of these facilities, the Library. To sustain the high regard in which the faculty is held worldwide, an excellent library and information service is essential.

This Library provides a specialised information service to the faculty and extends this role to promote animal health information provision throughout sub-Saharan Africa.

This includes holding training workshops for veterinary librarians from other countries in Africa, launching community engagement projects such as Vet Books for Africa, and organising and hosting international conferences, for example the 1st Conference of Animal Health Information Workers in Africa in 1995, and the 5th International Conference of Animal Health Information Specialists in 2005 - another first for Africa.

By naming this important facility in honour of the first South African to qualify as a veterinary surgeon, we are honouring Dr Jotello Festiri Soga's unique and important role as a veterinarian in South Africa in the late 19th century.

Dr Soga serves as an exceptional role model and pioneer for the black community, encouraging and inspiring a growing number of students applying to study in this field.

To be present here today will thus make us all part of an historic and unique event that will add further relevancy and significance to the already rich history of excellence and distinction that is associated with this faculty.

On behalf of the University of Pretoria I welcome you and hope that you will enjoy today's proceedings with us.