

NEWS FROM:



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UCT wins award for multilingualism

Multilingualism Awards of the Pan South African Language Board honour MBChB programmes in isiXhosa and Afrikaans

In recognition of the need for university graduates to be competent in more than one South African language, for the past decade the University of Cape Town has been developing training programmes in Afrikaans and isiXhosa that have been incorporated into the formal MBChB curriculum of the Faculty of Health Sciences.

In March 2011, UCT was named the winner in the education category of the the 2010/2011 Multilingualism Awards of the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB). This category examines the use and promotion of multilingualism in institutions of learning, including policies and tuition material.

The backbone of this programme is the Becoming a Doctor course, which spans the second and third years of the MBChB curriculum. "It's essential that health professionals are able to communicate in the patients' mother tongues in order to deliver the best possible service with the best possible outcome to those patients," said Professor Derek Hellenberg, the head of the Division of Family Medicine in the School of Public Health and Family Medicine at UCT.

Recent research by Associate Professor Ana Deumert, the head of linguistics in the Department of English Language and Literature at UCT, has shown that patients whose primary language differs from that used in the health system have a poorer understanding of their diagnosis, treatment recommendations and medication than do other patients.

The Faculty of Health Sciences began introducing initiatives to fill such gaps in 2003. The faculty started with Phase 1 of the Becoming a Doctor course in 2003, followed by Phase 2 (a semester-long intensive grammar course in isiXhosa (incorporated in 2008) and Afrikaans (incorporated in 2011). Phase 3, started in 2009, incorporates a four-week special study module in languages and family medicine, where some students live with host families in either Afrikaans- or isiXhosa-speaking communities for two and a half weeks. Phase 4, launched in 2010, integrated languages in bedside teaching in year four of the MBChB

programme, when students begin their clinical years. Over the next few years there are plans to include language learning and assessment into the final two years of the degree.

Other initiatives include the development by the Department of Internal Medicine of four CDs on clinical skills in Afrikaans and isiXhosa. The CDs are now available as an open educational resource.

The work has spawned a series of research projects, such as a survey on the impact of the language courses on graduates in their workplace, and a pilot project on the feasibility of the integrated teaching of family medicine, clinical skills and languages in a clinical facility.

The Faculty of Health Sciences worked with colleagues in the Faculty of Humanities and the Multilingualism Education Project (MEP), which is part of the Centre for Higher Education Development. MEP funded Phase 3 of the programme as well as the development of the clinical skills CDs.

Associate Professor Mbulungeni Madiba, the co-ordinator of MEP, said UCT's language policy is based on the need to prepare students to "participate fully in a multilingual society". He said MEP, working with the School of Languages and Literatures in the Faculty of Humanities, has drawn up and run a similar pilot short course for the Faculty of Law, with a view to incorporating it into the faculty's formal curricula in the near future.

ENDS

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