

The Importance of the conduct of Oral Health Research in responding to the Service Delivery Imperatives



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The School of Oral Health Sciences (SOHS) has been the beneficiary of contribution of research projects conducted at various SA Dental Schools in particular with reference to the 2020 International Association for Dental Research (IADR) hosted by SOHS. The quality and standard of the papers delivered resemble the thoroughness and the importance which researchers attach to their work notwithstanding, very heavy clinical responsibilities. The papers will also showcase the variety of research areas that the Faculty is pursuing at present all towards efforts to answer some very difficult research questions that prevail in the clinical domain of service rendering.

The Speakers were of a very high calibre at this first virtual 2020 IADR Conference hosted 12 & 13 November 2020 with guest speakers including: Mr M Muofhe, Deputy Director General (DDG): Technology Innovation, Department of Science and Innovation; Prof N Schellack, SMU Pharmacy School; Mr G Makubalo, SMU Centre for University Teaching and Learning (CUTL); Prof Seekoe, DVC: Teaching Learning & Community Engagement, Prof T Marwala, Vice Chancellor, University of Johannesburg; Hon Deputy Minister Mr BK Manamela: Dep Minister of Higher Education and Training, Prof Ayo-Yusuf, Deputy Vice Chancellor Research, Postgraduate and Innovation; Hon Deputy Minister of Health, Dr Joe Phaahla; Prof SA Karim, SA Clinical Infectious Diseases Epidemiologist; Dr A Glass, Virologist at Lancet; Dr Fundile Nyati: CEO, Proactive Health Solutions; Prof KS Motaung: Founder & Chief Exec Officer, Global Health Biotech; Prof Pablo Vargas: Oral Pathologist, Sao Paulo, Brazil; Dr J vd Walt: Chief Scientist SANEC; Dr Miniggio, Department Oral Maxillo Facial Pathology & Dr Nyalunga, Dentist/Lecturer, Integrated Clinical Dentistry, SOHS.

The purpose of all these research articles is to stimulate a deeper sense of interest in reflecting on exploratory pathways of how to improve the delivery of oral health patient care utilizing the best and most modern technology available and where so require to explore further pathways of how such technology can be improved. The advent of 3D Technology in Oral Health is but at its inception with so many possibilities to enhance the quality of

oral health services for improved patient care for our communities. The SOHS prides itself to render the best quality oral health services to the patients at both undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) level, noting that the Institution is the only public oral health facility located in the central demographic area of Soshanguwe, Garangkuwa, Mamelodi, Mabopane.



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The SOHS endeavour to inculcate in especially UG students the importance of the role that contemporary oral health research play in the training in the various fields of oral health in dentistry, oral hygiene and dental therapy. The further advantage that the SOHS has is that it is the only Oral Health School in the country that trains all three disciplines of Dentistry, Oral Hygiene and Dental Therapy at UG level. This advantage lends itself to train oral health professionals in teams based approaches not only in clinical and academic requirements but also in research projects and community outreach engagement. The further advantage that these oral health students experience is that the clinicians that supervise their clinical work and who teaches the online teaching and learning are located both in the public service and in private practice systems. This blend of the 2 systems further enrich the training of the oral health student, bringing to bear research outcomes in both systems, through which the students are exposed to new or improved techniques of services care delivery which practitioners have perfected in the private practice though rendered within the framework of the UG and PG curriculum.

The very highly specialised field of dentistry provides to the students with inquiring minds several options for further UG and PG research in the School. A further indicator is the number of academic staff who are pursuing further academic studies which involves research components where many of them are supervising students and can therefore respond to research questions that emerge at the dental chair side when patients are treated. In seeking to deliver the best type of oral health care there is an ongoing need to continuously seek new ways of improving service delivery so that in the end patients are satisfied with the oral health care received which should always be of the highest order of quality. This will entail that the student

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at their respective levels of training are very competent and that such competence are subjected to new research undertakings to improve the quality of care the patients receive.

The National Tertiary Service Grant (NTSG) has provided though very much limited funding for equipment that is used in the clinical training of UG and PG Students. Such equipment enhances the conduct of research so that better ways are explored to render optimal oral health care to patients. There is also the Clinical Training Grant (CTG) which provides both additional trained oral health personnel who can supervise both clinical training and research as well as equipment which can further enhance research training. This also involves the Dental Laboratory as a support service for student in training and the acquiring of computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacturing (CAD/CAM) equipment opens up several new areas of research possibilities.

One of the areas of research we need to explore further is the conduct of research by Postgraduate Student especially registrars. These students are required to complete a mini-dissertation (research report) and a publishable paper but as was reported often there time factor is the challenge to conduct such research. Departments are exploring efforts to address this matter because through such research projects new research questions are generated which can further improve the service delivery provided by these PG students. The SOHS Research

Committee is endeavouring to push for greater research output as demonstrated by the published papers over the last 12 months notwithstanding the challenges brought about by the Covid 19 pandemic, which precluded the conduct of research both Quantitative and Qualitative in accessing research subjects for the require information.

An area for further research exploration is the impact of OTL on the academic enterprise in particular that there is a greater requirement for self actualization learning by students and less class contact with lecturers. One of the drawbacks has been the support technology required for optimum learning and teaching as well as for assessments which have in part failed the system introduced by the University. The merits of the OTL may be generally very good but the implementation at our University has not been without challenges which lead to academic having less confidence in the outcome results of students. It is hoped that the University will invest more funding in this domain for high quality research to improve the OTL system to the benefit of both the students and the educators.

In conclusion, the vast area of dental research has contributed enormously to the field of dentistry, oral hygiene and dental therapy but more needs to be done in the field of oral health research so that the return on investment in higher education is commensurate with the expectations of high standard and quality education in the oral health in South Africa.
