

Hamilton Naki Clinical Scholarship awarded to promising SA researchers

The Hamilton Naki Clinical Scholarship, which was established to contribute to the advancement of South African academic medicine, has been awarded to two candidates. They are Dr Simnikiwe Mayaphi, a clinical virologist from the University of Pretoria and Dr Llewellyn Padayachy, a neurosurgeon from the University of Cape Town.



From L - R Dr Charmaine Pailman, MD of Netcare's Primary Care division, Dr Simnikiwe Mayaphi, clinical virologist from the University of Pretoria, and Dr Llewellyn Padayachy, neurosurgeon from UCT.

HIV research

Dr Mayaphi will use the scholarship to complete his PhD on HIV research at the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Pretoria. His research focuses on the detection and characterisation of acute and early HIV-1 infections, which are part of the window-period phase of HIV when infected individuals are highly infectious but are often not diagnosed by rapid HIV tests.

His project seeks to establish the feasibility of detecting and managing acute and early HIV infections in a low resource setting. "One of our aims is to provide an HIV transmission intervention service, in which highly infectious HIV-positive individuals are identified early, counselled and referred for appropriate management."

"South Africa still has a huge burden of HIV and the study is in line with local and global health priorities. There are many aspects of HIV that still need to be explored for us to understand and control the high prevalence of HIV in South Africa. This has placed pressure on South African researchers, other role players and citizens to play an active role in coming up with affordable and practical solutions in order to curb further spread of HIV."

Research on neuroglial disease in children

Dr Padayachy will be conducting research internationally on neurological disease in children, with a view to developing a brain-monitoring tool that is appropriate for use in the South African environment.

He is researching the potential of using trans-orbital ultrasound measurement of the optic nerve sheath (ONS), as a non-invasive, radiation-free, inexpensive brain-monitoring tool in children with raised inter-cranial pressure.

"An important goal of this work will be to evaluate the use of this non-invasive technique in our local setting. We then need to identify areas where the accuracy and simplicity of the technique can be improved so that it could be used effectively in rural clinics, primary health care facilities and emergency departments.

"In a resource-limited setting such as our own, such a technique would make a significant impact on improving the detection of paediatric patients with raised inter-cranial pressure, sparing children excessive exposure to harmful radiation from repeat CT scans, unnecessary anaesthesia and invasive diagnostic procedures."

Scholarship to improve South African research

Speaking on behalf of Netcare at the awards banquet, Dr Charmaine Pailman, MD of the group's Primary Care division, congratulated the two specialists on being awarded the scholarship, saying that they were both outstanding academics and researchers and most worthy recipients of the scholarship.

"They follow in the footsteps of the eight remarkable men and women who have received the scholarship in previous years, and who have subsequently significantly contributed to the progress in a variety of medical disciplines."

"The scholarship is a fitting tribute to Hamilton Naki and is dedicated to the quest for lifelong learning, growth, innovation and the improvement of the quality of life of all South Africans.

"Although he did not have a formal education in medicine, Naki worked as a laboratory assistant in the surgical laboratory of Professor Christiaan Barnard at Groote Schuur Hospital. He made a major contribution to medical education in South Africa and internationally, imparting his knowledge and skills to medical practitioners, as well as playing an important role in organ transplant research. It is in this spirit of learning that the scholarship was established."

The Hamilton Naki Clinical Scholarship was the brainchild of Professor Bongani Mayosi, head of the Department of Medicine at the University of Cape Town, who envisaged the establishment of a scholarship that would assist outstanding South African medical scholars to be able to continue to conduct groundbreaking medical research.

"In 2007, Professor Mayosi's vision was transformed into reality with the launch of the Hamilton Naki Clinical Scholarship under the umbrella of the Physician Partnerships Trust, which forms part of Netcare's Health Partners for Life programme." Dr Pailman is also a trustee on the board of the Physician Partnerships Trust.