

EDITORIAL

Virginia Zweigenthal (Dr) (virginia.zweigenthal@uct.ac.za)

School of Public Health and Family Medicine, University of Cape Town

The Faculty of Health Sciences holds an annual Undergraduate Research Day in which undergraduate students from Health and Rehabilitation programmes and from the MBChB programme present their research. Approximately 100 students presented their research in 31 oral and poster presentations at the 2015 annual research day held on 15 October. The event showcases student research conducted as self-initiated research or from course work from undergraduate programmes in the Faculty. It engenders an enthusiasm for enquiry and promotes the importance of formal research. This is in line with UCT's ethos of being a research intensive university and the Faculty's intention of producing professional who are life-long learners and engage in research.

All presenting students were invited to submit their studies as articles for UR@UCT, and five produced work worthy of publication. The articles cover a range of topics which are important and topical for health science professionals and their training.

Essack's study on hypertension amongst young people attending a local tertiary hospital clinic revealed that essential hypertension – high blood pressure with no apparent cause – is the commonest reason for hypertension. This is alarming and may indicate that the epidemic of non-communicable diseases is not a just disease of older people, and is also prevalent amongst young adults. This high-lights the importance of targeting prevention of common non-communicable diseases to young people.

A therapeutic relationship between health care providers and their patients is promoted if providers are empathetic. Studies on levels of empathy amongst health science students have hardly been done in Africa. Filling this gap, Rogers et al. conducted research on levels of empathy amongst audiology and hearing – pathology students. This revealed that students had high levels of empathy on entry to the programme which was, encouragingly, sustained throughout their studies. This

indicates that the programme produces professionals that are 'fit-for-practice', who care and are able to deliver a quality service.

Multi-drug resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) is a devastating disease that has become an issue of public health importance in South Africa and globally. It is extremely expensive to treat, and has dire consequences for those affected, as Maluleke et al, show in their article. A key drug used to treat MDR-TB can result in deafness. Their study, conducted at a local TB hospital shows that ototoxicity, damage to the inner ear causes hearing loss to a high proportions of patients. This damage increases with the length of time on treatment. With improved monitoring of hearing, and introduction of appropriate alternative therapies, this could be minimised.

Urban parks for recreation are a valued part of many cities and facilitate building communities. Images of urban parks in South Africa are often of dangerous, unkept places, used by indigent people or criminals. This image is contested by Becker et al. who conducted a fascinating study exploring the use of the space in an urban park in Cape Town. This park was well utilised by people – by children for play and by adults for recreation. Their observations of interactions between users showed that the space enabled the disruption of class, race and generational boundaries. This points to the value of public spaces which need to be included in planning policies and can be leveraged to promote inclusive communities.

The loss of a limb is a devastating event that adversely affects a person's functioning, impacting on their personal, social and work life. Functioning prostheses are prohibitively expensive and are often unaffordable for affected individuals and the health services. Van der Water Naude et al. explored a novel way of producing prostheses using 3-D laser printing technology. However, although this technology is becoming available, it is still not cost-efficient compared to traditional prostheses for weight bearing. We should however, "watch this space" as this technology is likely to become cheaper than traditional prosthesis manufacturing.

Thanks goes to the students who produced these interesting and often ground-breaking studies, and rose to the challenge of publishing their work. Thanks also to

their supervisors who supported them, assisting with project design, and editorial work to bring the presentations up to standard worthy of publication.