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Pharmacy students learn about the odds of infertility during a guest lecture

By Evans Khalo - evans.khalo@ul.ac.za



Third-year Pharmacy students learn about infertility as part of the Endocrinology and Reproduction Pharmacy module

A Fertility Specialist at the Limpopo Fertility Clinic delivered an insightful guest lecture, highlighting that significantly overweight or underweight women may have difficulty becoming pregnant

At the same time, alcohol consumption may increase the risk of congenital disabilities.

Dr Jackson Ndhlovu gave a guest lecture to third-year pharmacy students at the University of Limpopo (UL) as part of the Endocrinology and Reproduction module.

He also stated that smoking and drug use can lower sperm counts in men and increase the risk of miscarriages, premature birth, and low-birth-weight babies in women. According to him, infertility is the

inability to conceive after 12 months of intercourse for those under the age of 35, six months for those over 35, and three months for those over 40. He emphasised the importance of seeking professional advice for couples having difficulty conceiving, particularly those over the age of 40, because their egg quality may be compromised.

The distinguished healthcare practitioner also cautioned the audience that behavioural factors such as smoking, the excessive use of steroids for bodybuilding and

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Fertility Specialist Dr Jackson Ndhlovu delivered a guest lecture to third-year pharmacy students

excessive alcohol intake could all contribute to infertility in couples. "Conditions such as previous surgery, fibroids, polyps, and adenomyosis in the intracavitary may lead to obstruction of the uterus and fallopian tubes," he added. He also warned the students about the dangers of unprotected sex, stating that sexually transmitted diseases (STIs) can lead to infertility. Dr Ndhlovu also discussed the various

medical techniques available to help people with infertility conceive. As potential options, he specifically explained the process of Egg and Sperm donation and in-vitro fertilisation (IVF). With the Egg and Sperm donation, he further advised students to consider harvesting and freezing these whilst in their 30s (35 - 38yrs) for use later in life.

According to Dr Nkateko Mabila, a

Senior Lecturer in the Department of Pharmacy and the host of the guest lecture, the purpose of the lecture was to provide students with current and up-to-date clinical experience on infertility. Looking at what infertility is, the role of the ovaries & testes in fertility and infertility, societal norms, available treatment options, and challenges thereof.

"These lectures provide students with practical knowledge that will be invaluable in their future careers as pharmacy professionals. We want our students to interact with professionals who deal with what we teach them in class so they can link theory with practice and gain the necessary knowledge that will help them in their professional journey", Dr Mabila explained.

Dr Mabila added that their wish is to make this an annual event and bring more relevant specialists to expose students to different aspects of their course content. "If funding permits, I would also like to engage and bring international guests to this platform," she concluded.

Katlego Mabatha, a third-year student, stated that she did not understand the process of anovulation, which was clarified during the lecture. "The lecture was educational and exposed me to techniques such as endometrial biopsy used to diagnose infertility in females," Mabatha said.

UL, SANBI strengthen collaboration in biodiversity

By Malatji Monyelegwete - malatji.monyelegwete@ul.ac.za



UL and SANBI delegation meeting to discuss a Memorandum of Understanding in biodiversity

The University of Limpopo (UL) through the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research, Innovation and Partnerships recently hosted the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) to strengthen their collaboration in the field of biodiversity

This initiative is in line with the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between UL and SANBI in the first quarter of 2023. The MoU is expected to bring several benefits to students and staff from both institutions, including opportunities for collaborative research projects, co-authoring of scientific publications, and skill exchanges.

By leveraging their collective expertise and resources, UL and SANBI aim to enhance biodiversity research and conservation efforts while fostering academic growth and knowledge sharing within the field.

The MoU encompasses a wide range of collaborative areas, which include biodiversity data, fieldwork and information systems; biodiversity assessments, monitoring and

analyses; environmental issues with an impact on biodiversity; climate change adaptation; knowledge systems; and resource mobilisation and mainstreaming.

According to SANBI Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Shonisani Munzhedzi, the purpose of the bilateral meeting between SANBI and UL was to solidify and expand their collaboration beyond the signing of the MoU.

"We are here to operationalise the MoU and get the involvement of teams responsible for driving different areas of collaboration."

The CEO added that the successful implementation of the MoU requires all stakeholders to come together, commit to the collaboration, and engage in detailed discussions on

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SANBI CEO Shonisani Munzhedzi says UL and SANBI partnership will foster academic growth, research advancement and capacity building in biodiversity

and Partnerships, the meeting was deemed successful and marked a historic moment in the relationship. "The MoU outlines various modalities for collaboration between UL and SANBI. These modalities include co-authoring outputs such as peer-reviewed publications, books, and technical reports, indicating a commitment to jointly contribute to the academic and scientific literature in the field of biodiversity," Prof Singh explained.

Dr Millicent Kekana, Head of Department of Biodiversity in the School of Molecular and Life Sciences at UL, emphasised the University's intention to establish a myriad of collaborations in the field. "One of our goals is to organise joint undergraduate and postgraduate excursions and to foster joint supervision and research collaborations, focusing not only on invasive plants but also on other areas of priority for SANBI," said Dr Kekana.

how to best implement intangible aspects of their partnership.

Munzhedzi further highlighted that the MoU will also reflect on the impact on the improvement of the lives of people in various forms within the space of biodiversity. He stated that UL's Herbarium is not only for the collection of plants; it is also a space for learning.

The Executive Dean of Faculty of Science and Agriculture, Prof Hlengani Siweya, expressed that "the meeting serves as a platform to put into action the commitments outlined in the MoU signed between the two institutions. An equally important aspect is exploring ways in which UL students can benefit from the partnership." According to Prof Jesika Singh, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research, Innovation



Prof Jesika Singh, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research, Innovation and Partnerships at UL

Agricultural University in Bulgaria and UL to expand collaborations

By Malatji Monyelegwete - malatji.monyelegwete@ul.ac.za

The University of Limpopo (UL) has taken proactive steps to strengthen its international collaborations in order to incorporate global perspectives, experiences and best practice into its programme qualification mix

As part of these efforts, UL hosted a delegation from Bulgaria's Agricultural University of Plovdiv to discuss academic staff and student mobility, joint research opportunities and teaching and learning collaborations.

The two parties' joint effort began in early 2022, when UL representatives visited the Bulgarian university to forge a partnership. This was followed by a visit from two UL master's students who had spent a semester training in the field of agriculture, specifically plant medicine.

Building on the success of the initial visit, UL is set to send five Master's students to the Agriculture University of Plovdiv this year to learn more about Agricultural activities. The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in late 2022 between UL and the Agriculture University of Plovdiv solidified the partnership and outlined the areas of collaboration. The MoU embodies both institutions' commitment to supporting student development, academic exchange and faculty collaboration.

Several agreements were reached during a recent visit by the Agriculture University of Plovdiv to strengthen their collaboration in the field of



STRENGTHENING RELATIONS; from left: Prof Mbambo-Kekana (UL), Prof Boryana Ivanova (Agricultural University of Plovdiv), Prof Svetla Yancheva (Agricultural University of Plovdiv), Prof Mahlo Mokgalong (UL), Prof Jesika Singh (UL), and Prof Dimo Atanasov (Agricultural University of Plovdiv)

agricultural education. One of the key agreements, according to Prof Paulus Mafeo, Director of School of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences at UL, was to strengthen their collaboration through a student exchange programme.

"We have agreed to work together to develop collaborative qualifications. This entails developing a joint curriculum or qualification that students can pursue at both UL and the Agricultural University of Plovdiv. Students will be supervised and guided by faculty members from both universities under this arrangement, ensuring a comprehensive and well-rounded educational experience," said Prof Mafeo.

Prof Mbambo-Kekana, UL Director for International Affairs, added that one of the key agreements reached during the collaboration with the Agriculture University of Plovdiv was related to student mobility, specifically credit mobility.

Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research, Innovation and Partnerships at UL, Prof Jesika Singh added that the

collaboration with the Agricultural University of Plovdiv was part of a funded project under the Erasmus+ Programme, specifically in the School of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. She stated: "The MoU between the two universities outlines the project and its funded activities, which include provisions for tuition, meals, travel expenses, and more. This funding ensures that the collaborative activities between UL and the Agricultural University of Plovdiv run smoothly."

Vice-Rector of International Cooperation at the Agricultural University of Plovdiv, Prof Svetla Yancheva, reinforced that the two universities had reached an agreement to collaborate in the field of mobility through the Erasmus+ Programme. "In the coming years, we hope to continue our fruitful collaboration and shape the agricultural field and mindset together. I am extremely pleased with the agreement on exchange students because students are our ambassadors," Prof Yancheva stated.

Gearing up to provide key solutions in mathematics

By Malatji Monyelegwete - malatji.monyelegwete@ul.ac.za

The Department of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education (DMSTE) at the University of Limpopo (UL) converged key stakeholders in mathematics education in a two-day seminar to discuss best practice and strategies to tackle low numeracy levels in the education sector

The seminar, titled 'Mathematics Education Lessons Study', was delivered by a renowned full professor of mathematics education at the University of Stavanger in Norway, Prof Arne Jakobsen. He attributed a lack of collaboration among practitioners as one of the main contributing factors to low numeracy levels in South Africa and other parts of the world.

In his plenary speech titled 'Lesson Study in the Professional Development of Teachers and Teacher Educators', Prof Jakobsen said that mathematics can be a powerful transformative tool in developing countries as it has influence in the education system, infrastructure, economy, socio-economic conditions, culture, morality and living standards in general.

Prof Jakobsen called upon subject advisors, educators, academics and researchers who were in attendance to collaborate towards finding



Full Professor of Mathematics Education Prof Arne Jakobsen

solutions to mathematics teaching challenges and come up with strategies.

One of the key issues addressed in the seminar was the quality of mathematics teachers, particularly in numeracy and mathematics instruction. The seminar acknowledged that the poor quality of teachers can have a significant impact on the overall quality of mathematics education. Recognising this, participants engaged in discussions and workshops to identify potential solutions and strategies to improve the teaching skills of mathematics educators.

Prof Jakobsen particularly focused on the importance of lesson study as a method to enhance the teaching and learning of mathematics. "Lesson study involves collaborative planning, teaching, observation and reflection among educators, leading to continuous improvement in teaching practices and student outcomes. By implementing lesson study, educators can further their professional development, exchange ideas, and implement effective teaching strategies," the Adjunct Professor at the Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences explained.

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Delegates attending the DMSTE seminar are eagerly anticipating the opportunity to find solutions for the challenges faced in mathematics education

Moreover, the Head of Department of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education at UL, Prof Suresh Singh, highlighted the significant role of mathematics in various sectors such as banking, engineering, software development and the country's economy. "It teaches us about analytical skills and being coherent," Prof Singh stated.

Reflecting on the seminar, Senior Lecturer in Mathematics Education at UL, Dr Lekwa Mokwana, stated the significance of mathematics in other

countries, where it is considered like their mother tongue, and said as countries adopt international standards, it remains important to apply the lessons in context. "Reflecting on the seminar on lesson studies should consider its relevance to addressing the poor performance of mathematics in South Africa," said Dr Mokwana.

Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning at UL, Prof Richard Madadzhe, pointed out that students and learners, together with their

educators, should make mathematics fashionable and prioritise it since it is deemed to be a difficult subject to learn. "The county is in need of mathematics experts because it will help with the development and improve the rank of mathematics teaching and learning," he said, adding that mathematics is a gateway to studying qualifications considered to be scarce skills, such as medicine and science.

Univen benchmarks at UL on student support programmes

By Reuben Maake - reuben.maake@ul.ac.za

The University of Venda (Univen) paid a visit to the University of Limpopo (UL) to conduct benchmarking activities in an effort to align and ensure quality to its student support programmes

The benchmarking visit to UL, organised by Univen's Centre for Higher Education Teaching and Learning (CHETL), offered a chance to evaluate student-centred activities and improve several programmes, such as the Mentoring and Tutoring Programme (MENTUT), which involved recruiting and monitoring student mentors.

Head of Academic Development Unit under CHETL, Dr Fathuwani Ravhulali, expressed the significance of benchmarking, stating that is crucial "for enhancing the well-being and success of the students." Dr Fathuwani said they chose UL because it has one of the best-curated student support programmes that is strong at developing students. "We have learnt best practices and shared knowledge on how our MENTUT programme can be reconfigured to enhance success through learning and teaching support and to also ascertain whether the process of recruiting mentors, tutors and interviews can be improved."



UL's Centre for Academic Excellence staff members engaging with Univen staff members on student development programmes

Director for Centre for Academic Excellence (CAE) at UL, Prof Owence Chabaya, highlighted the key UL student support programmes, include the Mentorship Programme, Reading and Writing Centre, Supplemental Instruction, and Tutorship programme.

With 300 students being recruited each year, according to Dr Tukisho Molantoa from CAE indicated that the mentorship programme is one of the largest development initiatives. She stated that the recruited mentors are given training in community engagement and leadership. Dr Molantoa is in charge of a Tutorship programme which provides extra contact learning sessions with students for improved mastery of content.

Dr Tebogo Lekota, who coordinates the Reading and Writing Centre under CAE, told to the Univen counterparts that the centre appoints 80 language consultants who are trained in reviewing

assignments, conducting literature reviews, and demonstrating leadership skills. "Under the programme, we also collaborate well with KINDIS (lecturers), who volunteer to provide similar services." Dr Lekota also mentioned that they have poetry, essay, and play writing competitions for students.

Takalani Tshililo, Educational Development Practitioner at CHETL at Univen, applauded CAE and stated that their goal was to develop a well-coordinated structure. "We ran into difficulties with training and recruiting. We've learnt to use language consultants and collaborate with lecturers."

The team was also impressed by the Reakgona Disability Centre's cutting-edge equipment and services for students with disabilities, such as orientation and mobility, IT, and Braille services, among others.