

**Professor Sibongile Muthwa**

**Vice-Chancellor - Nelson Mandela University**

**Welcome and opening**

**Medical School Launch**

**11am, Tuesday 30 November**

Thank you, Programme Director, Professor Fikile Nomvete,  
The Honourable Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology,  
Dr Blade Nzimande

- MEC of Health, Ms Nomakhosazana Meth
- Executive Mayor of Nelson Mandela Bay, Cllr Eugene Johnson
- Prince Langa Mavuso, Acting Head of the House of Traditional Leaders in the Eastern Cape
- Chancellor of Nelson Mandela University, Dr Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi
- Chairperson of Council of Nelson Mandela University, Ambassador Nozipho January-Bardill and other council members in attendance
- Deputy Vice-Chancellors and members of management present,
- Executive Deans, Deanery and Campus Principals

- Executive Dean of Health Sciences Faculty, Professor Zingela and colleagues, and members of the Health Sciences Faculty, including Director of the Medical Programme, Professor Nomvete
- Senators
- President of the SRC, Mr Pontsho Hlongwane and members of the SRC in attendance
- Alumni, including many of our honorary doctorates
- Representatives from our donor community and the community of Missionvale
- Members of the Nelson Mandela Choir
- Our students: past, present and future
- Family, friends, colleagues and members of the public joining us online

Good morning and a warm welcome to you all as we celebrate the realisation of a very significant and historic milestone for Mandela University and our region. I feel extremely privileged to be part of this moment, as we witness a dream brought to life through the collective effort, perseverance and courage of our internal and external stakeholders, often under very trying circumstances.

I would like to preface my remarks by expressing my heartfelt appreciation for the role that each of you has played in bringing us to this historic moment: the official launch of the tenth Medical School in our country on our Missionvale Campus. Our government, both National and province, particularly the departments of Health and of Higher Education. Dr

Nzimande, sir thank you. Our Premier, and our leadership from all walks and persuasions; the academic community; our colleagues at other medical schools; including in particular Walter Sisulu University, our international partners from whom we learned so much, the NMU Medical School Steering Committee; our former and current members of Council; our visionary former VC, Prof Swartz; Prof Vic Exner, former dean of faculty of health sciences, Prof Dalena van Rooyen the deputy dean; and last but not least, the unforgettable, energetic late Prof Lungile Pepeta. He poured his soul into this Project. He would have been bouncingly proud today. And we are grateful for his animating vision, and contribution. I recognise the presence of his wife here today, Dr Vuyo Pepeta. As custodians of this project, and to honour Prof Pepeta's memory, we can only commit to pursue only excellence in medical education, as it is only through excellence that we can liberate our agency to do more.

With social justice at its core, Nelson Mandela University's new Medical School is set to change the healthcare landscape of South Africa, the Eastern Cape, and the lives of those communities it will serve in Nelson Mandela Bay and beyond. This is one of only two medical schools in our region, with our sister institution, Walter Sisulu University, having offered the sole medical programme until now, to serve the vast population of the Eastern Cape Province.

Mandela University's medical programme seeks to embrace a comprehensive primary healthcare approach, underpinned by the pillars of disease prevention, namely, health promotion, treatment, and

rehabilitative medicine. We believe in an integrated, interprofessional approach to healthcare that addresses the underlying social determinants of health, such as access to decent housing, education and social services.

Our community-based ethos aims to cultivate socially conscious medical doctors who will compete globally, but who also have a deep passion to change the lives of vulnerable, underserved communities.

Mandela University's medical school is intentionally being anchored on our Missionvale Campus in Gqeberha to engender urban renewal and regeneration, for the benefit of our surrounding communities. We are actively pursuing partnerships with local government, business, other educational institutions, and public and private health service providers to promote access to comprehensive health services, as part of an envisaged integrated health and education innovation precinct.

We believe that the best approach to medical education and healthcare service delivery is one that harnesses the wisdom and agency of our communities to advance preventive approaches.

Ladies and gentlemen, the timing of this launch has been delayed by the Coronavirus pandemic and, as I address you this morning, the fourth wave is making its presence felt through a new variant identified by our country's scientists. This has been our reality for the past two years, and it is a credit to all involved that we have persevered in these uncertain times, to realise, rather than defer, our dream of launching the medical school today.

Informed by the advice of the Health Professions Council of South Africa, Mandela University restricted its initial intake of MBChB students to fifty in 2021 and this cohort was selected out of a pool of over 5000 applications. Next year, our intake will increase to eighty first-year students and the demand for placement remains high with more than 5 500 applications already received.

My wish is that this first cohort of medical students, the class of 2021, understands the significance and momentousness of this occasion, this landmark moment as we launch the first medical school in the post-apartheid, democratic South Africa, of which you the class of 2021 are part of.

We continue to receive **requests and interest** from highly qualified doctors, specialists, and professionals from all over South Africa and internationally, all wanting to be part of this exciting journey. One of the first appointments in 2019 was that of the director of our medical programme, Professor Fikile Nomvete – a gastroenterologist from Livingstone Hospital and former head of its internal medicine department.

We also express our gratitude to the specialists and practitioners at other medical schools in our country for their generosity in collaborating with us to design our innovative curriculum. It is through such partnerships that we will continue to discover groundbreaking, socially responsive solutions to the vexing health challenges confronting our country, the African continent and globally. Our specialists and clinicians here in our Province have been sterling in their support, and we thank them.

Through Vision 2030, Mandela University reaffirms its commitment to change the world through humanising educational opportunities, innovative and transdisciplinary research, and transformative engagement. In doing so we are confident that, while the human and capital investment for the new medical school is significant, the returns for public health education and research, will be even greater through improved health outcomes for our local communities, region and nation.

The best contribution that this medical school can make, as well as the Health Sciences Faculty as a whole, is to restore and expand the dignity of the most vulnerable, by living out the ethos of care and humanity, particularly for those who would have been stripped of hope and dignity, because of the unequal socio-economic system in which we continue to live.

Our University is named after former President Nelson Mandela, who was a tireless campaigner for free primary healthcare services for the most vulnerable in society. We are honoured to continue his incredible legacy through our medical school - as well as the contributions of all our faculties, disciplines and professions - to promote a more socially just, healthy and sustainable future for all.

I thank you and would now like to welcome our Chancellor Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi to the podium. (*INTRO TO NEXT SPEAKER*)