



**Medical Students Oath Taking Ceremony: Vice-Chancellor's Message**

**10:00 7 May 2021**

**Missionvale Campus**

**Programme Director**

**Deputy Vice-Chancellors**

**Executive Deans**

**Academics, Scholars, Professors**

**Members of the Health Sciences Faculty, Acting Executive Dean Professor van Rooyen, Director of the Medical Programme, Professor Nomvete**

**Members of Management**

**Representatives from our donor community**

**And most importantly, our medical students**

It is with humility that I greet you this morning in what will certainly be remembered as a historical moment in the life of our University. I stand before you

filled with a constellation of emotions - **pride** to see our first inaugural cohort of medical students here at Nelson Mandela University; **joy** at your remarkable achievements that have enabled you to be here today as a medical student; and also feeling sheer **gratitude** considering the enormity of the collective journey that has brought us to this ceremony today, coupled with the prospect of all of that lies ahead for you to complete the journey to graduation, when you will leave the university to serve in your chosen profession.

For our part, we commit that we will do all we can as the University to enable your success and make sure that your time here at Mandela is a memorable one.

Our wish is that today remains etched in your memory throughout your life-journey, knowing that you have made history as the first cohort of the 10<sup>th</sup> medical school in South Africa, and the first one, realised in the post-apartheid era in South Africa. My hope is that the oath that you will take today serves as a signpost that will guide you throughout your practice of medicine - wherever may find yourself in the future, and in whatever way you choose to deploy your talents as a medical practitioner, or as a scholar of medicine.

Nelson Mandela University is more than just a name of the institution at which you are undertaking your studies. Our identity as a university is irrevocably bound to that of our namesake, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. To this end, we place social justice at the core of our purpose as a university. This quest is reflected throughout our three scholarly missions of Learning and Teaching; Research; and Engagement. We are unequivocal in our resolve to position our institution as a University that is

in service to society. It is critical that this becomes part of the fibre of every graduate.

Our wish is that the pledge that you make today affirms your commitment to serve with integrity and humility in discharging your responsibilities to the public first as a medical student, and later as a practitioner. It is a solemn promise through which you pledge to do what is morally right in your duty of care to patients and society.

Even though most of us primarily remember Mandela as the iconic global leader who led the fight to abolish apartheid, and who laid a foundation for an inclusive and democratic South Africa, his work in advancing health equity is equally profound. I wish to share a few striking examples of this, and all of you here today would be know many more to add.

Madiba was tireless in promoting children's rights to healthcare. One particular expression of this was his support of efforts at access to life-saving vaccines against preventable diseases. In pursuit of this, he served as the founding chairperson of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization's Fund Board (GAVI). Through this vehicle he gathered together world leaders, advocated for every child's right to immunization, and secured over \$800 million of dollars in commitments for universal vaccination programs in Africa. In recognition of the global contribution of GAVI, the university awarded an honorary doctorate to its CEO Dr Seth Berkley. As further acknowledgement of Madiba's love of children and his belief in their right to health care, the university more recently bestowed an honorary doctorate on Sibongile Mkhabela who served as the CEO of the Nelson Mandela Children's

Fund for two decades. One of her greatest accolades was leading the campaign to raise the capital funds required to design, build and equip only the second dedicated paediatric facility in Southern Africa, the Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital.

With the right to access health care enshrined in the South African constitution, as President of the country, Madiba further championed access to health care through initiatives such as the Phelophepa health train. This mobile hospital brought much needed medical and educational health services to people in South Africa's most remote rural areas. Mandela also played a critical role in de-stigmatising HIV and AIDS, at a time when globally everyone shied away from talking about this, despite high global death rates in the early 2000's.

I trust that you will remain steadfast and true to the commitment you are making today. May the oath you are about to take instil in each of you to always serve with compassion while respecting the unique histories, cultures, and beliefs of patients and families that you will encounter. May this oath help you to stand steady in times when you face moral dilemmas which are part of this noble profession.

The other day I again listened to the Lecture of one of the most outstanding young African writers, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, where she talks about the pitfalls of looking at human beings through the prism of a single story. She reflects that our tendency to regard humanity through the perspective of a single story strips people of their humanity and minimises the value and richness of their diversity. She concludes by saying that a stereotyping embedded in a single story, does not affirm

people's individuals, communities and nations with an asset base they bring to every situation. She concludes by saying that the tragedy of a single story is that it is not a complete story.

It is for this reason that here at Mandela we espouse the philosophy of a humanising pedagogy which recognises and affirms the diversity of strengths and rich experiences that our students and staff bring to the learning experience. It is my hope that you will experience this, and embrace it as you go about with your training and later through your practice.

I want to thank our national government for entrusting us with this noble responsibility of launching this medical school. Our provincial and local government and the people of this city for role they played in keeping the dream of the medical school alive. I want to thank our former Vice-Chancellor, Professor Derrick Swartz, and our the University Council, for their vision and groundwork in making sure that we today have our first cohort of medical students. Indeed, the role of the medical fraternity in this city since the early days of planning and up to now has been sterling.

The work on planning for the school was first driven by Dean Vic Exner and the team in the health sciences faculty colleagues. We thank them. For me I will not be able to leave this podium without mentioning the outstanding role played by our departed Executive Dean of Health Sciences Professor Lungile Pepeta, taken from us too soon, whose dedication, hard work, his vision of a medical school that is designed to re-assert the dignity of the most vulnerable and marginalised communities, led us this far. I hope that in taking your vows you commit to keep that dream alive.

We will be following your paths as students with keen interest. I wish you success and look forward to celebrating with you into the future on graduation day.

In closing, let us remember the words of Mandela, when he said:

*“What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead.”*

I thank you.