



A Year of Transformation and Excellence in 2024



UKZN'S HEARTBEAT



The College of Health Sciences (CHS) concludes 2024 with remarkable achievements, despite the challenges posed by institutional restructuring and project renewal, including the freezing of posts and the inherent disestablishment of certain schools. As the year ends, some of the uncertainties have begun to clear, offering a more defined path forward. The College will transition to a streamlined two-school model, ensuring that every staff member and student is affiliated with a specific school. A clear framework has been established for teaching and learning roles, as well as professional services staff, providing much-needed clarity. Guidelines for staff placement have also been introduced and redeployment remains a possibility for certain positions.

With a focus on innovation, resilience, and academic leadership, CHS has continued to advance its mission, delivering impactful research, transformative teaching, and fostering strategic collaborations within the health system. On the innovation front, we have reviewed the strategy for innovation at CMC and its almost ready for presentation at EMC.

This year, CHS hosted several notable conferences, including the Health Professions Education conference; the International Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research; the South African Association for Counselling and Development in Higher Education (SAACDHE) conference; National Occupational Heat Stress Symposium featuring international experts; the Southern African Neuroscience Society (SANS) conference and several others. A highlight was the prestigious Southern African Association for Health Educationalists (SAAHE) 2024 Conference, organized by our Health Professions Education Unit. With over 300 delegates from 13 countries, this event underscored our leadership in health professions education.

Teaching and Learning

We also made significant progress in academic advising, with our active involvement in the Siyaphumelela Project and the development of a short course aimed at professionalizing academic advising. The Teaching Excellence Awards recognized the innovative teaching methods and dedication of our educators, celebrating excellence in both general and clinical teaching. In the CHS, our winners are Professors Deshini Naidoo and Alvin Munsamy as well as Dr Reina Abraham. Recipients of the 2024 Vice-Chancellor's Teaching Excellence Certificate Awards are Professors Varsha Bangalee and Pamela Pillay as well as Dr Serela Ramklass.

Additionally, we proudly secured full HPCSA accreditation for the MBChB programme, ensuring the next generation of healthcare leaders are trained at UKZN. We also achieved full accreditation for Audiology, Speech Language Pathology, Physiotherapy, Optometry and Dentistry, reinforcing our position as a powerhouse in health professions education. The MBChB curriculum was revised, with a comprehensive conceptual framework and consultations completed. This is to ensure improved compliance with academic rules through new review committees. Significant strides were made in aligning our MMed academic rules with University regulations, ensuring consistency and clarity in decision-making processes. Further, sub-specialty qualifications with HPCSA accreditation was initiated for cardiology, rheumatology, geriatrics, gastroenterology, and pediatric oncology.

The CHS also strengthened partnerships with private hospitals (Netcare, Busamed, Mediclinic and Life Healthcare) creating new teaching, learning, and research opportunities. New postgraduate diplomas were launched in Nursing Education, Health Services Management, Adult Critical Care Nursing, and Midwifery. The new 4-year B Med Sciences degree in Entrepreneurship and Innovation was approved by the Council for Higher Education. Centre for Rural Health completed a five-year external evaluation, recognizing its transformation into a model for health systems strengthening.

Research

Eight of our staff made it into the UKZN Top 30 Researchers list including, Professor Mahmoud Soliman (8), Professor Anil Chuturgoon (10), Dr Hezekiel Khumalo (17), Professor Anita Naicker (18), Professor Themba Ginindza (19), Professor Rajshekar Karpoomath (20), Professor Beatriz Garcia De-La-Torre (23), and Professor Tulio De Oliveira (29). Eleven academics successfully improved or secured NRF ratings, with CHS hosting the largest proportion of B-rated researchers at UKZN.



The CHS staff secured prestigious grants including a R60 million Wellcome Trust grant to implement a multidisciplinary, multi-country climate and health project on child respiratory health and heat exposure.

Substantial funding was also secured in the form of a £2 million grant from the UK's National Institute for Health and Care Research for the extreme weather early warning system project led by Professor Saloshni Naidoo from Public Health. The Cancer & Infectious Diseases Epidemiology Research Unit (CIDERU) received R15.3 million in Phase III funding from the Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation for lung cancer care, bringing total funding for this project to over R63 million. A \$100,000 Gates Foundation grant was awarded to Professor Karpoomath for anti-TB drug discovery.

Professors Bongani Nkambule (2023) and Rubeshan Perumal (2024) received Vice-Chancellor's Research Awards whilst Professor Andile Khathi received the "Under 40" Research excellence award for 2022. Professor Sabiha Essack was honored with a UKZN Fellowship and the international Christiana Figueres Policy to Practice Award. Professor Thumbi Ndungu became the highest grant bearer at UKZN and he was also elected to the prestigious US National Academy of Medicine. Professor S. Singh became President of the International Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research – South Africa Chapter. The CHS offered scholarships of R11, 88 million and bursaries of R3 million as well as running expenses of R4,6 million. For the first time, the CHS offered R300 000 for Honours students and R1.2 million for emerging researchers.

The Biomedical Research Unit purchased the zebrafish breeding system. This will give researchers an option to use zebrafish as a model for biomedical research besides using rats and mice.

Strategic Collaborations with the Department of Health (DOH)

In 2024, CHS and the Department of Health (DOH) further strengthened their partnership through strategic engagements, including a three-day strategy session held in Hilton. This session fostered innovative thinking, and it is anticipated that valuable outcomes will emerge to improve the functioning of the health system. Additionally, the Primary Healthcare Re-engineering Committee has been working diligently, helping to rebuild trust between UKZN and the DOH.

Key outcomes included:

- Renewed efforts in Primary Health Care (PHC) re-engineering.
- Establishment of the KwaZulu-Natal PHC Transformation Committee, which facilitates research-informed policy and practice.
- Development of innovations aimed at improving the health system's functionality.
- Faculty members achieved five NRF ratings, highlighting their research excellence.

International Partnerships

The School of Laboratory Medicine and Medical Sciences started work on a preclinical trials unit in collaboration with Emory university. The Discipline of Family medicine signed a Master of Clinical Training Affiliation Agreement with the University of California Los Angeles. The agreement formalizes the conditions around the exchange of UCLA and UKZN medical trainees, and details some of the key learning objectives of these rotations. The School of Nursing and Public Health signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Health Professions Council of South Africa to run the exams for all foreign doctors wanting to practice in South Africa.

The CHS hosted a high-level delegation from Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China and Newcastle University Medicine-Malaysia. The CHS is also in discussions with the Soka university in Japan on a nursing collaboration.

Looking into 2025

As CHS steps into the new year, the College remains committed to driving excellence in health sciences education, fostering impactful research, and leading transformative collaborations. Key focus areas include advancing health system innovations, nurturing emerging researchers, and scaling initiatives that address health challenges across KwaZulu-Natal and beyond.

With 2024 serving as a testament to resilience and collaboration, CHS enters 2025 poised for even greater achievements.

- Professor Busisiwe Ncama
Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Head