

MEDIA RELEASE FOR PR NEWSWIRE FROM CLIENT WITS UNIVERSITY

ATTENTION: NEWS EDITORS AND REPORTERS

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MINISTER OF HEALTH TO ADDRESS NEW LEVEL OF HEALTH WORKERS AT WITS GRADUATION

This Thursday, 8 December 2011, the first cohort of students completing the Bachelor of Clinical Medical Practice (BCMP) degree will graduate from Wits University to enter the health service as part of a new cadre of health professionals, Clinical Associates. This is a significant development as Clinical Associates are part of the Seven Foundations of South Africa's Human Resources for Health (HRH) model, captured in the recently launched national Department of Health's HRH SA 2030 strategic plan.

Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, Minister of Health, will deliver the key note address at the Faculty of Health Sciences graduation ceremony starting at 10:00. Members of the media are invited and should RSVP to Buhle.Zuma@wits.ac.za

In many rural parts of South Africa, people have extremely limited access to quality health care services. This is largely due to weak district health systems and a severe lack of trained human resources for health. It is estimated that there is just one practicing doctor per every 4,219 people for the vast majority of the population. In response, a task team assembled by the South African National Department of Health established a scope of practice, training curriculum, and exit outcomes for a new mid-level healthcare provider, the Clinical Associate.

Similar to Physician Assistants in the United States and Clinical Officers in East Africa, Clinical Associates are university-trained medical professionals who will work primarily at district hospitals. They are an integral member of the clinical team, working under the supervision of doctors to provide medical services ranging from conducting routine patient consultations and performing common procedures, to providing emergency care for acute conditions and managing chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and HIV/AIDS. Clinical Associates are registered with the Medical and Dental Professions Board of the Health Professions Council of South Africa.

Wits launched the BMCP degree programme in 2009, with an initial intake of 25 students; 23 of these students were funded by the National Department of Health, of whom 12 were from Gauteng and 11 from North West. This three year degree emphasises the acquisition of hands-on clinical skills that Clinical Associates need to take their place as essential members of district-level care teams. The rigorous, nationally standardised curriculum is competency-based; it prepares students to provide any medical service within their scope of practice that is delegated to them by the supervising medical practitioner.

Three years after the first cohort started, all 25 students have successfully completed the degree and will enter the health service as clinical associates, in district hospitals in Gauteng and North West provinces.

Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, Minister for Health has expressed confidence in this new breed and mid-level medical worker saying: "Clinical Associates will be competent, professional members of the public healthcare sector. They have the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to function effectively in

the district health system, primarily working under the supervision of qualified medical practitioners, to assist with emergency care, procedures, and inpatient care.”

“Clinical Associates will play a vitally important role in rural health care. From the outset, rural doctors have welcomed this new cadre of workers and have looked forward to working with them. Their support of the team in rural district hospitals will ensure better care for patients and will also enable doctors to engage in greater outreach to clinics,” says Prof. Ian Couper, Director, Wits Centre for Rural Health.

The Wits BCMP programme is offered in collaboration with the National, North West and Gauteng Departments of Health, and the South African Military Health Services.

In order to achieve its goals, the Wits BCMP degree programme introduced a number of innovations, such as the following:

- Students have clinical exposure to patients from the very beginning of their first year
- Problem-based learning is focussed around practical, clinical experiences
- The curriculum is integrated throughout, with one course being delivered per year; basic and applied sciences as well as clinical reasoning are taught through case scenarios.
- Students undergo clinical training and are located in district hospitals, initially in Johannesburg, but from second year onwards, in distributed sites such as Kopanong Hospital in Vereeniging and Lehurutshe Hospital near Zeerust.
- Students are taught by generalist practitioners (family physicians, emergency physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, etc), drawing in specialists as needed.
- Students work alongside doctors and medical students from the outset.

Wits is proud of the achievement of the students, and the academic staff who nurtured them, and looks forward to seeing the contribution they will make to the health service. The University expects to increase enrolment in 2012 and subsequent years in order to assist in the delivery of quality care.

For further information, contact Professor Ian Couper on 082 8010188 or ian.couper@wits.ac.za

ENDS

Buhle Zuma

Communications Officer

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Tel: 011 717 1018

Fax: 086 5533 092

E-mail: buhle.zuma@wits.ac.za

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