



Medical students embrace rural health

Final and sixth year medical students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal are thriving in rural health facilities as part of their six week placement there, under a new rotational programme introduced by the Department of Rural Health, UKZN College of Health Sciences with the support of the Medical Education Partnership Initiative (MEPI). The introduction of the programme, says **Dr Sandy Pillay**, Communicating Principle Investigator of the MEPI-UKZN grant, allows medical students first hand experience of community health issues.



KZN HEALTH BULLETIN asked some of the students how the experience has shaped their outlook...



Phindile Chonco
St Andrews Hospital

"I learnt that listening to patients is a healing remedy on its own."

"At St Andrews I learnt how to manage patients alone, transfers patients and how to treat a patient holistically. There were some challenges but the experience definitely taught me how to be a better person and to be able to deal with people with different personalities.

I learnt about the importance of being able to work with other people and to understand people in the workplace so we can be a good team. I also learnt that we cant medically help all people and sometimes you should listen with compassion and give advice on how best to handle the illness and that listening to patients is a healing remedy on it own.

The experience has made me a stronger and more understanding person. Patients used to come to the hospital just wanting to be admitted because they have nothing to eat at home or they don't have a shelter to go back to so its important to be understanding of some patients and not to only look at the sickness they have but look at them as a whole.

As someone from a rural area I would go back and work there, because I know that there is a huge shortage of doctors and a lot of patients needing help. Also, as a person from a rural background, other people from rural areas can be encouraged to see that they can become what ever they wish to be. It does not matter where they come from, its what they want to be that counts."



Mohamed Khan
Emmaus Hospital

"I was terrified when I was told I had to live in a rural area for six weeks!"

Mohamed comes from a traditional background with strong family values. He describes his initial reaction to being sent to live in a rural area for six weeks as 'a complete shock'.

"I've spent most of my life living in the big cities of KZN and had no idea what to expect from my rural experience so was not looking forward to it. But once I arrived at Emmaus Hospital all my worries were put to bed. I was pleasantly surprised by the living arrangements, the hospital facilities and most of all the welcoming nature of the people of Emmaus.

The NGO's and the work they do in the heart of the rural communities really opened my eyes. My day spent there taught me a valuable lesson that no task is too small to make a difference.

Before I started my rural experience always dreaded getting out of the city for my community service. This experience has taken away that fear factor and I definitely think Emmaus will be my first choice for comm serv, come the end of my internship. The main reason for this is the community of Emmaus who made me feel welcome and I'd like to go back there as a qualified doctor so I can help the people and hopefully make a difference."



Siyanda Kubheka
Bethesda Hospital

"It's a humbling experience."

Siyanda studied medicine in Cuba before returning to South Africa to undergo his six week placement. We asked him to compare his knowledge and training here to his experience in Cuba. He had this to say:

"The rotational program here helped me supplement the knowledge that I acquired in Cuba. It moved me from an academic situ-

ation to a practical setting where I could experience the daily health challenges that people face in their lives. The range of acute cases in rural hospitals in South Africa is much wider than in Cuba. m've learnt a lot and it reminds me why I wanted to become a doctor. It puts everything into perspective and makes you humble.

Students on the programme must avail themselves of opportunities to see new things, do procedures and be open about their experience. They must involve themselves and try to gain as much knowledge from the experience, because you learn more from working in rural areas than anything you read in books." ■