

Celebrating 40 years of the WSU Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences: Legacy, impact, and future directions

The year 2025 marks a profound milestone in South African medical education: the 40th anniversary of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences at Walter Sisulu University (WSU). Established in 1985, the Faculty was founded on a vision to expand access to medical training and to address the pressing health needs of underserved communities, particularly in the then Transkei and Ciskei homelands (now Eastern Cape province) and beyond.

From its earliest days, the *South African Medical Journal* (SAMJ) has been a steadfast companion in the Faculty's journey. In the very first month of WSU's medical school existence, the SAMJ provided a platform for scholarly dialogue, critique, policy reflection, and the dissemination of research that helped shape the identity of the institution. This enduring relationship has ensured that the Faculty's voice - rooted in equity, service, and transformation - has resonated nationally and internationally.

Over four decades, the Faculty has grown from modest beginnings into a dynamic hub of medical education, research, and community engagement. Its graduates, trained in contexts of scarcity and resilience, have become leaders across South Africa, the continent, and the world, embodying the ethos of service to humanity. The Faculty's contributions have been particularly significant in:

- **Health workforce development:** Producing doctors and health professionals committed to rural and peri-urban service.
- **Research and innovation:** Advancing knowledge in areas such as primary healthcare, infectious diseases, oesophageal cancer research and health systems reform.
- **Policy influence:** Informing national debates on equitable healthcare delivery and the transformation of medical education.
- **Community empowerment:** Building bridges between academia and society, ensuring that medical training remains responsive to local realities.

Yet challenges remain. Persistent inequities in healthcare access, the global shortage of health professionals, and the need for sustainable

models of medical education demand renewed commitment. As we celebrate this anniversary, we are reminded that the Faculty's founding vision of achieving health equity through education, remains as urgent today as it was in 1985.

This special edition of the SAMJ, dedicated to the 40th anniversary of the WSU Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, consists of three parts:

- The first part provides a historical overview of the Faculty's establishment and growth.
- The second part features contributions from alumni, faculty members, and collaborators who reflect on the institution's impact in shaping healthcare delivery in South Africa.
- The third part presents case studies and research reports that exemplify the Faculty's ongoing commitment to innovation, service, and transformation.

We trust that readers will find inspiration in these reflections and insights. The story of WSU's Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences is not only one of institutional achievement, but also one of collective resilience and vision. As we look to the next 40 years, we remain confident that the Faculty will continue to serve as a beacon of hope, equity, and excellence in medical education.

Prof. Sikhumbuzo A Mabunda

Guest Editor

South African Medical Journal

Associate Dean, Strategic Affairs and

Internationalisation, WSU Faculty of

Medicine and Health Sciences

Head of Clinical Department, Public Health

Medicine, Walter Sisulu University

Director: WSU Global Centre for Human

Resources for Health Intelligence, East

London, South Africa

