



Success story of young pharmacists

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These success stories are hosted by Mr Kesentseng Jackson Mahlaba, who is a pharmacist and a lecturer. He is a health advocate in vaccine hesitancy, medicine management and rational medicines use in order to improve access to and adherence to medicines by patients and communities at large. He is the current Chairperson of the North Gauteng branch of the South African Association of Hospital and Institutional Pharmacists and a scientific advisor to the South African Vaccination and Immunisation Centre at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University.

If you want to be hosted to share your success story as a vibrant young pharmacist who has less than 5 years' experience post their internship, please email Kesentseng at kesentseng.mahlaba@smu.ac.za.

Meet Ntandoyakhe Nxumalo



1. Introduce yourself to the readers of SAPJ so that they have a broader understanding of your journey to this point.

My name is Ntandoyakhe Nxumalo. I'm a young clinical pharmacist with a very special interest in HIV medicine management, aiming to establish antiretroviral stewardship programs. As you would know as pharmacists that we've got antibiotic stewardship; now, we're trying to establish a very broad structure of antiretroviral stewardship programs. My other passion lies in paediatric patients.

2. Where did you study pharmacy, and what made you choose pharmacy as a career choice?

I did my undergrad pharmacy degree at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU). It was during my final year when I realised I wanted to know and to do more incorporating, more direct patient contact. So, I then thought clinical pharmacy was my go-to. I then did my master's degree at SMU.

From a very young age, everyone back home knew that I had this big desire to save lives. And I think the best way I saw I could go about this was through the use of medicine. So then I thought to myself, you know what, my journey will begin with a pharmacy degree. I truly feel fortunate as a pharmacist to be the first point of reference for many people who need healthcare services.

3. Most, if not all students, experience obstacles during their study period. What were some of those obstacles for you and how did you go about overcoming them?

SMU is a very good institution to be in and it is mostly inclusive for all. On a personal side, members of the LGBTI community at times fell short with regard to inclusivity e.g. having structures in place that catered for vulnerable students and populations within the campus. Academically, I think one of the biggest obstacles that I came across during my undergraduate studies was the workload we were faced with, especially in my first year.

Later, during my academic internship, I found it very difficult to manoeuvre pharmaceuticals and for obvious reasons, of course (laughs). This subject was not my strongest point, but I thought to myself, I am a smart candidate and I knew I could progress well with more effort.

4. If you could highlight one thing that kept you motivated during your studies, what would it be and why?

I think it's my passion for the pharmacy profession, it's when I get to provide pharmaceutical care as a clinical pharmacist at a patient's bedside. It is when I intervene to aid vulnerable and dependent patients to a point where they get to walk out of the hospital to their families, healthier and alive. There is truly nothing that drives and pushes my passion more than that.

5. They say: If you want to go fast, go alone but if you want to go far, go together. During your time at university, who were some of the people who "walked with you" to get you to the point of graduation?

My first support was my family, particularly my mother and siblings. Secondly, getting to the point of graduation was heavily attributed to the financial support (bursary) I received from a programme that offered healthcare course tuition. This particular funder also allocated mentors who can relate and understand challenges of university life for all the students who were awarded the bursary. I was privileged to be able to sit with my mentor on a regular basis. Personally, I think that having mentor support is what assisted me throughout my studies. More so due to my background where no one has ever gone to university at home,

mostly they could not relate to challenges I would face from time to time.

6. Where is your other support structure (fellow BPharm undergrad classmates)?

WOW! It is exciting to know that so many of my friends are spread out in all sectors of pharmacy. Other are regulatory pharmacists while others are industrial pharmacists. Some are in pharmacy practice (retail) and unsurprisingly! others are in management positions.

7. Coming from an academic environment, how did you experience internship at first and were you able to see how the BPharm degree prepared you for the practice setting?

What a wonderful journey! from exposure to teaching, assessing and research work. I must say, research at master's level evoked a passion in me, I did not know was there. I'm a researcher at heart! Then there was a team that received me when I started my internship, a team of people who held my hand and walked the journey with me. At that time, they were seeing potential in me I did not see, I can safely say I am this person today thanks to them and I strongly believe that I can do what they did for me for the next person.

My undergraduate was very well structured, exposing me to practice-based learning in all sectors of pharmacy. This exposure aimed to develop employer-ready candidates, hence I believe I can thrive in any industry of pharmacy. It's a pity where I am now, I find it very homey, I do not see me leaving academia.

8. Since completion of internship, how did you advance through the pharmacy profession to this point? What posts and positions followed?

After graduating with my master's degree in clinical pharmacy, I went and did my community service in retail pharmacy in a rural community in the Northwest during the COVID-19 pandemic. I was fortunate to be chosen to be one of the champions in my area. Due to the high number of COVID-19 vaccinations we were doing, I ended up enrolling for an immunisation techniques course. Post my community service, I was employed in a private sector hospital where I was exposed more to clinical pharmacy practice. I then moved to a big hospital in the Eastern Cape where I worked as a clinical pharmacist fully looking after four ICUs, and general wards. It was during this time where I saw myself bringing change in my work space. What an exciting and fulfilling time in my life.

Currently, I work for SMU as a lecturer in the School of Medicine where I teach pharmacology to most courses e.g. medicine, nursing, physiotherapy, dietitian, dentistry, oral hygiene, dental therapy. But excitingly! I am moving to the School of Pharmacy soon, where I'll be working in the Department of Clinical Pharmacy, where I will be teaching and training undergraduate and postgraduate students.

During your employment in a hospital setting where you worked as a clinical pharmacist, how did you find interprofessional collaborative practice?

In practice, a lot of healthcare professionals in most instances work independently and/or are territorial. I would not be confrontational under these circumstances but share my knowledge. What is most unfortunate is that patients are the ones who get compromised.

What can be done to improve it?

Now currently, in my career as a lecturer, I've been involved in Interprofessional Education and Collaborative Practice (IPECP). This programme brings collaborative teamwork among health sciences students in tertiary institutions where each discipline intervenes to a case presented in order to improve patient morbidity. Remember! we all can learn from one another as healthcare professionals. This programme aims to ensure that young graduates start their careers appreciating working in a collaborative team. I was privileged in the past while at SMU to be part of the team that worked on the IPECP programs with the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

9. How do your current daily duties and responsibilities compare to what you envisioned a pharmacist doing when you selected pharmacy as a career path?

At the beginning of my pharmacy journey, I used to see myself at the dispensary window dispensing medication to patients. This idea of a pharmacist quickly faded as I progressed in my undergrad when I realised that there is more to pharmacy.

My duties currently, even though I'm not at the patient's bedside, play a vital role in preparing future healthcare professionals, ensuring that future generation of healthcare professionals would be well knowledgeable to give their best in practice.

10. How would you define "success"?

WOW!!! In short, success is an internal thing based on individuals' preferences, it is a state of mind. What I can say now, is that I'm not yet successful. I wake up every day and I say to myself, I can do more, have the potential to do more and I will fight to be more.

11. How does your definition of success align or differ from the world's or South Africa's perception of success?

Mh!!! I study, I qualify, I work and buy a car and a house and I wait for retirement, that is it. That's how people define success. I define my success with my career, I simply want to be more.

12. Tell us what makes your story a success story, from which readers can tap inspiration from.

Your background can never define you, if I look at where I come from (disadvantaged rural background with a single parent), an environment that constantly tries to tell you that you will not amount to anything in life! I am not there yet, but have done better for myself. Let me put it into context, my high school did not have a microscope, during biology class we only saw a cell

drawn on a chalkboard and have our teacher define it in IsiZulu, you can imagine what this did to my transitioning to varsity life. I never knew that there was someone called a lecturer during my early childhood years, but hey, look at me now!

13. Which elements do you think one needs to impact your environment, whether your community, profession, or workplace? Do you believe you have made an impact in pharmacy to date?

I think the most important thing that we do not do is going back to where we come from to engage and support our communities. We need to also support young, vulnerable pharmacists, provide platforms for them to showcase their skills/capabilities and award them proper recognition. This is how I see us growing and being united as pharmacists.

I have tried to make an impact in line with what I just said above. I attend the SAPSF conference (I was once an executive committee member) annually, where I get to paint an actual realistic picture

to students attending of what they're going to see out in practice. Further, I prepare clinical skills competition using real life cases not of treating hypertension independently but treating it while considering comorbidities. The aim is to ensure that students understand how to approach internship onwards and have access to mentors.

14. What is the ONE thing every reader can contribute to make pharmacy a better profession or more valued by our patients?

Always ensure that every environment you find yourself in, when you walk out, people need to know better and do better. It lies with continuous training. You pharmacists need to put in more clinical hours!

15. How would you like to be remembered one day?

As the one who touched people's lives more than anything, regardless of who or where they are in life. I want you to be remembered as the man who made a difference in people's lives.