



The 69th SAPSF Conference: uniting future pharmacists in Gqeberha

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The 69th South African Pharmaceutical Students' Federation (SAPSF) Conference, hosted by the Port Elizabeth Pharmacy Students Association (PEPSA), was a significant milestone in the Pharmacy student community. Taking place from 31 January to 02 February at the scenic Willows Resort and Conference Centre in Gqeberha, Eastern Cape. It was the first coastal SAPSF conference since 2015. The event was steered by Conference Convenor, Gamuchirai Nyereyegona, along with a dedicated reception committee, ensuring a well-organised and impactful experience for all attendees. The conference revolved around the theme: **"Shaping the Future of Students through Innovation, Collaboration, and Pharmaceutical Advancements."**

Kicking off the main conference

On Saturday, 01 February, the main conference commenced with an inspiring opening address by Ms Celeste Naude from the Nelson Mandela University Pharmacy Department. Drawing from the venue's name, The Willows, she symbolised the willow tree as a representation of pharmacy students—emphasising resilience and having a strong academic foundation. She further urged attendees to leverage the conference as a networking platform.

Following her, Dr Stavros Nicolaou, a Group Senior Executive for Aspen Pharma Group and a recipient of the prestigious Industrial Pharmacy Section Medal at the 2024 FIP Congress, delivered an insightful virtual address. He spoke about his role during the COVID-19 pandemic as a member of the President's advisory committee, symbolising that pharmacists have a seat at the table. He called on students to embrace their roles as future leaders in the pharmaceutical industry and to make a meaningful impact in patient care and community service.

Ms Mandisa Ngcakani, the Alternate Director of the Independent Community Pharmacy Association (ICPA), addressed the ethical dilemmas faced by those owning independent pharmacies, focusing on finding a balance between passion and profit. She reminded students, "We cannot get to profits without caring for our patients."

Ms Alice Lategan, Chairperson of the PSSA Cape Midlands Branch, shared her journey in pharmacy and encouraged students to find their voice and be actively involved in the profession.

A session led by Lt Colonel Precious Ncayiyana, explored the role of pharmacists in the military, shedding light on this unique and

impactful career path. This was followed by the keynote address from Ms Refloee Mogale, Executive Director of the PSSA, who introduced the PSSA sectors and their advocacy roles for pharmacists. She also discussed emerging pharmaceutical specialties, particularly in response to unemployment challenges, and encouraged students to take on leadership roles and not merely be spectators.

Networking and celebration

After an enlightening day of discussions, students enjoyed a private beach fun day, fostering inter-branch connections and camaraderie. In the evening, the Gala Dinner brought together delegates and distinguished guests. One of the key highlights was the launch of the latest SAPSF publication titled "The Final Chapter of the 2023/24 PresCo", presented by the SAPSF Media and Communications Officer, Mr Tiko Khosa and Editor, Ms Stacey Kundiona.





The Presidential Committee honoured guests, including esteemed speakers and Ms Ntombizodwa Luwaca, Chairperson of the PSSA Young Pharmacists' Group, with special tokens of appreciation. The evening concluded with a motivating speech from Ms Refiloe Mogale, who emphasised the importance of professional networks, mentorship, and remaining connected to the broader pharmacy community.

Final day: reflection and transition

The last day of the conference began with a scenic hike around Nelson Mandela University (NMU), allowing students to explore landmark



points and reflect on their journey. The final session of the conference featured branch reports and a Clinical Skills Competition, led by Ms Vuyiseka Ntsalu from NMU's Pharmacy department.

Following the competition, the 2023/24 SAPSF Presidential Committee, led by Mr Tshepiso Masiganuga, was officially dissolved, paving the way for the election of a new leadership team that will carry SAPSF into its next chapter.

Conclusion

The 69th SAPSF Conference was a resounding success, reinforcing the importance of collaboration, leadership, and professional growth within the student community. With a rich lineup of speakers, engaging discussions, and meaningful networking opportunities, this conference set a strong foundation for the future of pharmacy students in South Africa. As SAPSF continues to foster a culture of innovation and excellence, the impact of this gathering will undoubtedly resonate in the years to come.