



## Success story of young pharmacists

**Thuto Bodibe**

### Introduction

Dear Fellow pharmacy community, welcome to this exciting interview with this vibrant young pharmacist. In this series of interviews, we will be having discussions with pharmacists who have less than 5 years' experience post their internship regarding their success stories, "their" being the operative word. We want to get you our fellow pharmer stories of young pharmacists who made their mark in the profession according to their standards.

Thank you to the South African Pharmaceutical Journal (SAPJ) for requesting these interviews in order for us to showcase the great work that is being done out there. Visit SAPJ online for the latest issue of the journal for stories like this and all your clinical reviews on self-medication topics, information on prescription medication and all other essential information for referring customers for early medical attention should it be required.

My name is Kesentseng Jackson Mahlaba; I am a pharmacist and a lecturer at the School of Pharmacy at the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU). I have been in the profession for over 15 years' in institutional pharmacies and over eight years in academia.

I am 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. I am the current Chairperson of the Northern 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.

### Meet Thuto Bodibe

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

My name is Thuto Bodibe, a 28-year-old pharmacist from Soweto. Currently, I am practising at Stanza Bopape CHC, a Community Health Centre (CHC) in Mamelodi, named one of the busiest clinics in Tshwane.



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

I studied both my undergraduate BPharm degree and postgraduate MPharm degrees in Public Health Pharmacy and Management at SMU. After completing matric, I was determined to pursue a career in healthcare in order to help people, but I was unsure with regards to the discipline to choose and also lacked funds to apply to various universities to improve my chances to secure space. This resulted in me spending a year at home. However, during that time, I underwent career counselling and explored various courses; this is where I truly met pharmacy. I decided to apply at the University of Limpopo, Medunsa campus, now SMU. Mind you, I had only applied to one university and fortunately I was accepted to begin my studies in 2015.

- 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?**

During my undergraduate studies, I really cannot recall many obstacles, aside from grasping certain concepts and the way of learning at university. This put tremendous strain on me as I had to put in extra effort and time to ensure I passed. However, resilience was my guiding force. Also, I was fortunate to have a supportive network of friends and some academic staff who ensured that no student was left behind. Additionally, we had mentors assigned to us to help navigate the programme. All this support played a role in the award I received for being one of the top two learners in my class in my final year of undergraduate studies.

Transitioning to my postgraduate masters studies, the first year was challenging but manageable. I successfully balanced my responsibilities as a student and an academic intern. However, the second year brought unforeseen challenges with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. This period affected most students' mental health, myself included. Just after I completed my research proposal, I was informed that I couldn't proceed with data collection as my study required direct client contact. This setback necessitated a protocol amendment and an extension of my academic internship. Despite these challenges, I had unwavering support from my supervisors, other academic staff and a few friends who kept me going. Ultimately, I achieved a distinction in my dissertation after examination.cdfx

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

The fear of failure served as my driving force. I was terrified of the prospect of failing and returning to poverty in the township where I grew up, without achieving anything. Being the first person in my family to attend university, I felt a profound responsibility to make my grandmother proud. Although the journey wasn't easy, and it continues to pose challenges, I am determined to persevere. It is crucial to never give up, "Whatever the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve" - Napoleon Hill.

**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?**

I was fortunate to have an incredible group of friends from my undergraduate years who motivated and supported each other. The academic staff members of SMU were also exceptionally supportive throughout my journey. Additionally, I received support from a non-biological family who embraced me as an adult and helped whenever needed. Some of my friends evolved into family, and our bond remains strong to this day. We continue to support each other through thick and thin.

**6. 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?**

The BPharm programme introduced me to Problem-Based Learning (PBL) as the primary teaching method, this for me was totally a new teaching approach compared to the traditional methods I experienced in high school. In PBL sessions, we were presented with real-world problems or case studies we had to work through in groups to identify solutions. Guided by a facilitator, we honed our critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. This learning approach enabled me to think quickly, creatively, and employed my problem-solving skills effectively, which proved invaluable during my academic internship. Moreover, my undergrad played a significant role in enhancing my confidence, particularly in communication and presentation skills. Weekly presentations and active participation in small group facilitations were integral components of our learning process.

Now my internship required that I apply what I had learned in my undergrad as I had to actively seek solutions to the challenges I encountered. This hands-on experience further strengthened my ability to think on my feet and tackle various situations.

I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity provided by my education, as it equipped me with essential skills that continue to benefit me in my professional endeavours today.

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

After completing my academic internship at SMU, I embarked

on my community service at Tshwane Regional Pharmacy. Subsequently, I seized an opportunity to become the second pharmacist at Stanza Bopape CHC. Initially, during my first year at the clinic, I experienced misalignment in my studies and my practice. Determined to make a difference, I stepped out of my comfort zone and became involved with a programme focusing on adolescents and youth, "The Adolescents and Youth-Friendly Services (AYFS) programme". This programme was initiated by the Department of Health, to promote health and well-being of young people aged 10-24 years. This programme was relaunched at our facility in December 2022 with a mission to enhance the health status of young individuals through illness prevention, promotion of healthy lifestyles, and enhancement of healthcare delivery systems. Its objective is to emphasise accessibility, efficiency, quality, and sustainability of youth-friendly health services.

I have been fortunate to be nominated to serve as the chairperson, leading the implementation and promotion of AYFS, a role that is incredibly rewarding as it allows me to actively contribute directly at a micro level of health within our community.

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

There isn't a significant disparity between my current daily duties and what I initially envisioned a pharmacist's role to be. However, my passion lies in public health related work. I find fulfilment in planning health campaigns, providing health advocacy at schools within our catchment area, and promoting the clinic's services, particularly focusing on prevention methods such as contraception and STI prevention. My primary goal is to make a positive impact wherever possible.

**9. How would you define 'success'?**

Success, for me, means not just achieving goals but finding fulfilment and meaning in what you do.

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

I think everyone interprets success differently, for me, success doesn't only entail having a lot of money nor does it mean not valuing money. Based on my definition, the alignment comes when I am able to wake up every day and pursue goals that align with my purpose, finding fulfilment and meaning in what I do.

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

I'm not sure if I've reached a point in my career that qualifies my story as a success. However, I firmly believe that anyone striving to achieve their goals must understand that the journey won't be easy. It requires resilience and determination to push through challenges. My continuous willingness to learn and grow serves as my driving force, propelling me forward. I hold onto the belief that I am destined for greatness.

**12. 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 am going to discuss my experience and current workplace. To make a difference, one needs good communication skills, influence on policies, teamwork, and dedication to public service. Periodically, it's crucial to evaluate the effectiveness of existing systems and policies and identify areas for improvement. Additionally, engaging with clients whenever possible is essential.

I believe I have made a modest impact in the field of pharmacy, and with further opportunities, I am confident I can do more. I

am passionate about learning more as a pharmacist, in order to contribute towards public health efforts.

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

Prioritising empathy is essential during client interactions. Adopting a compassionate approach fosters trust and enhances the overall perception of the profession.

**14. How would you like to be remembered one day?**

I want to be remembered as a dedicated pharmacist in public health who made a lasting impact on the well-being of clients, ensuring access to essential medications, promoting health education, and contributing significantly to disease prevention.