

SOUTH AFRICAN COMMITTEE OF MEDICAL DEANS

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THE SOUTH AFRICAN COMMITTEE OF MEDICAL DEANS CELEBRATES THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF AN ENGAGED AND VISIONARY MEMBER

On Friday, 7th August 2020, the members of the South African Committee of Medical Deans (SACOMD*) reacted with heartfelt expressions of shock and sadness on receiving the news that Covid-19 related complications had claimed the life of their colleague and friend, Prof Lungile Pepeta, Executive Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences of Nelson Mandela University.

The sense of shock and sadness still lingers and Prof Pepeta will be dearly missed by the Committee, but the members' experience of engaging and working with him as well as the tributes pouring in for him call for a celebration of his rich life and legacy.

Prof Pepeta was a highly qualified and seasoned medical practitioner whose experience in public and private health facilities in urban and rural settings impressed upon him the need to train healthcare professionals who are equipped to service the communities in which they will be practising. In this, he shared the vision of the Nelson Mandela University to have its Faculty of Health Sciences and its soon to be launched Medical School oriented towards primary healthcare, i.e. on prevention rather than cure. For three and a half years he led the Faculty with conviction, commitment and boundless energy towards the realisation of this vision.

At the same time Prof Pepeta was a prime example of an academic engaged in his local community. He was actively involved in the Eastern Cape's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and led his university to also become involved in practical ways such as providing necessary medical equipment and making its mobile clinic available for testing. He wrote or co-wrote and publicly spoke about the pandemic and how to deal with it in comprehensible, practical terms, always bearing in mind the opportunities this crisis created for improving healthcare in the province. In this regard he "lived" one of the key values of the SACOMD, namely active stakeholder engagement.

The Committee extends its sincere condolences to Prof Pepeta's family and wishes them the support and strength they need to come to terms with this dreadful loss. The members of the Committee trust that the family may find solace in the knowledge that their loved one was respected, deeply appreciated and highly valued by his peers.

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SACOMD also extends its deep condolences to the executive leadership of the Nelson Mandela University and the staff and students of the Faculty of Health Sciences. The Committee's thoughts are with the Faculty management that has to steer it through this huge, unexpected setback and wishes them wisdom and strength in picking up the baton to realise the university's vision for the Faculty, building on Prof Pepeta's legacy. The Faculty can count on the support and assistance of the members of the Committee whenever needed.

It saddens SACOMD that Prof Pepeta will not be there to welcome the first students of the new Medical School next year and guide and inspire them on their journey to becoming competent, caring and engaged health professionals.

Prof Pepeta will live on in the fond memories the SACOMD members have of him.

May his soul rest in peace.

**SACOMD comprises the leadership of the Medical Schools in South Africa.*

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