

Tribute to Prof Bongani Mayosi

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My association with Bongani goes back to ca 2006. We worked together to establish the Cardiovascular and Metabolic Disease National Collaborative Research Programme, the precursor to the present MRC Non-communicable Diseases Research Unit. (See below the opinion paper that we wrote in 2010)

Since then we worked on several initiatives. All along, one thing that stood out was his passion to develop the next generation of medical researchers and he tirelessly sought funding and other resources - in partnership with the MRC - to achieve this goal.

In 2010 he obtained an unrestricted educational grant from AstraZeneca to hold **the International Course on Research Methodology** for about 30 young South African cardiovascular and metabolic disease researchers. He invited eminent faculty from Canada led by Professor Salim Yusuf from McMaster University together with local faculty to conduct the course.

In 2011 he successfully applied for funding from PepsiCo to organize **The International Ten Day Teaching Seminars** under the auspices of the International Society of Cardiovascular Disease Epidemiology and Prevention. Thirty-eight fellows from 21 countries attended the seminar at a venue outside Cape Town. In a letter to the MRC, Kay-Tee Khaw the ISCDEP Seminar Coordinator wrote: *"We are indebted to Professor Bongani Mayosi's initiative in bringing the seminar to South Africa..."*

We often discussed big ideas over a meal at restaurants' in Pinelands. During one such meeting - in 2012 - in his role as chair of the National Health Research Committee he requested me to write a proposal to the National Department of Health to establish the **National Health Scholars Programme**. Thus far, over 80 young South Africans have benefitted from this programme.

Last year I worked with him on **"A Proposal for the Establishment of a Comprehensive Hamilton Naki Clinical Scholars Programme, 2018 – 2024"**. This Programme aimed to become the first comprehensive scheme to provide a research pathway to the professorship in medicine, and contribute to the transformation of South African medicine and position our country as a world leader in the training of health professionals of the highest calibre and the production of new knowledge in the health sciences.

Bongani was a rare individual – a visionary leader, world class clinician and researcher, highly intelligent, thoughtful, caring, patient and was incredibly modest about his achievements. He ably demonstrated these qualities. For instance, I heard from other sources that he was awarded the Order of Mapungubwe (Silver) in 2009. In 2007, despite his hectic lifestyle he consulted and sacrificed a Sunday afternoon to visit my friend who suffered a cardiac arrest.

Rest in peace my dear colleague and friend. Forever remembered.



Bongani and Niresh discussing the programme at the Sweden/South Africa Workshop held at the MRC, Oct 2015

Opinion paper

Hearts and minds

Studies show that cardiovascular and metabolic diseases amongst South Africans are increasing at an alarming rate. This appears to be a world-wide trend and particularly pronounced in developing world countries.

Cardiovascular diseases such as hypertension and stroke and metabolic diseases such as obesity and diabetes are classified as non-communicable diseases. This group of diseases together with communicable diseases (such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria), perinatal and maternal illnesses and injury-related deaths are contributing to a quadruple burden of disease in South Africa and sub Saharan Africa.

Increasing urbanization, poverty, obesity and lifestyle changes are some of the factors put forward for the increasing burden of cardiovascular and metabolic diseases. The challenge is to mitigate these factors.

Several initiatives have been proposed to deal with this growing problem. One such is the National Collaborative Research Programme (NCRP) on Cardiovascular and Metabolic disease to be established

under the aegis of the Medical Research Council (MRC). The mission of the NCRP is 'to formulate and apply an integrated programme of research and capacity development in order to improve the prevention, understanding, detection and management of cardiovascular and metabolic disorders in South Africa.'

One of the pillars of the NCRP is the research capacity development through training courses, workshops and seminars. To this end the MRC is organizing an international Health Research Methodology course for about 30 young cardiovascular and metabolic disease researchers. Eminent faculty from Canada led by Professor Salim Yusuf from McMaster University together with local faculty will be conducting the course and made possible by an unrestricted educational grant from AstraZeneca.

Against the background of compelling evidence, there is no doubt that a highly trained cadre of researchers is the key ingredient to tackle health problems in general. However the challenge is to integrate and harness all of this talent into a cohesive programme of research. And this needs to be done quickly.

As we mulled over solutions and ideas, a thought struck us. As most of you would know, South Africa will be hosting the biggest world spectacle ever, that is, the Soccer World Cup 2010. This was a far-fetched idea a decade ago, yet 10 years down the line and we are at the threshold of hosting the mother of all events. That we will be successful is a given.

Surely there are parallels that can be drawn from this experience which could be translated to accelerate the achievements of research goals, be it the reduction in the incidence and prevalence of Cardiovascular and Metabolic Diseases or the total elimination of these diseases.

With this single event, we have achieved world class standards in soccer stadium design and logistics, transport networks, high tech telecommunications links, hospitality industry, partnerships between the public and private sector, national identity and patriotism to name a few.

There are other best practices that the health research community can emulate from the game of soccer. The formula of successful teams is a well thought out strategy, a flexible game plan, effective teamwork, skilled players, endurance, achieving goals, a passionate support base and long-term sponsorship.

We need to change the hearts and minds of researchers, funders, policy makers and patients. This can only be achieved by developing and sustaining partnerships of all roleplayers.

It is likely that South Africa will win the accolade of hosting the best Soccer World Cup ever, and so we will win in the battle against cardiovascular and metabolic disease through research and action.

Dr Niresh Bhagwandin
Prof Bongani Mayosi

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