



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & REHABILITATION SCIENCES  
UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

- Communication Sciences & Disorders •
- Disability Studies • Nursing & Midwifery •
- Occupational Therapy • Physiotherapy •



# DHRS

Department of Health and  
Rehabilitation Sciences

FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES

# DHRS COMMUNIQUE

JULY - DECEMBER 2020

# FROM THE HOD'S DESK



HEAD OF DEPARTMENT:  
A/PROF LEBOGANG RAMMA

## My Dear Colleagues

The year 2020 has been like no other year. We started the year with news of a highly contagious virus that was causing havoc in China, and later Europe. While we knew, without a doubt, that this deadly virus will eventually reach our shores, we had no idea how it will affect us. So, if you are reading this message right now, count yourself lucky because it means you are one of the lucky ones. We're not out of the woods yet, we have now entered the 'second wave' and the road ahead still looks tough. However, unlike the first wave in which there was a lot unknown, I now know for certain that I can count on the resilience of this collective (DHRS family) to live to fight another day.

Emergency Remote Teaching was a curveball that most of us had to overcome and adapt to. While most of us most likely had it in our plans to increase the use of online platform in one form or another, the pandemic forced us to make use of online platforms for conducting most of our teaching activities during 2020. I was humbled to see the commitment by colleagues who attended what seemed like endless CILT courses on remote teaching. As we migrated our teaching resources online, the transition that followed was a delight to witness. Tracking of students' engagement with online teaching, constant interaction with students to support them and all the extra work that you put in to ensure that we successfully complete the 2020 academic year (barring a few exceptions) was highly appreciated.

Many of you have been working non-stop since the beginning of this year. Very few have had a chance to squeeze in a day or two of leave. The fact that we were working from our homes, and the blurring of the lines between what constitute office hours versus 'after hours' made matters worse. I just hope that we'll all get a chance to get a breather before the start of the new academic year.

Some members of our DHRS family have been exposed to the virus and thankfully all of them recovered. All of us have been affected in one way or the other. We have lost family members, relatives, friends and even students. Despite this, we have always come together to support each other and found a way to carry on.

Our purpose as a department in the Faculty of Health Sciences has been made clear by our 2020 experiences. We're all here for something bigger than ourselves and we need each other to achieve that. This year has also reminded us that the things that we used to take for granted such as, an opportunity to sit in one room to have discussions and or have our meals together are critical for our well-being. It is indeed the little things in life that add value. We need to be thankful and grateful for the amazing people that we work with. Most importantly, we must appreciate our families who have stood besides us as we struggled through this tough year.

My 2020 message to each member of the DHRS family is simply to say THANK YOU. Thank you for everything you have done for your students and colleagues. There were many tough times, but we always found a way to come together (albeit virtually) to discuss issues that affected us. In the end your commitment and dedication was what made us successfully navigate this difficult year. Let us never forget that we are a great Department, made up of some of the most outstanding individuals in different fields of study. It is no coincidence that we successfully made it through 2020. Nothing can stop you.

Have a wonderful holiday break. I look forward to starting an exciting 2021 with all of you.

Sincerely,

Lebogang Ramma

P.S We struggled to organize an end of the year celebration.

However, we have managed to defer that to early 2021 and will keep you updated.



**DHRS**

# IMPACT OF COVID-19

ICU in Covid times meant having to do things differently. It started with donning each morning and remembering to have all PPEs on correctly. It was not easy to get accustomed to especially since students had spent 6 months behind computers with no clinical exposure. However, students were resilient and although unsure and a bit scared of what being back on the clinical platform would entail initially, they grabbed the opportunity to learn with both hands. Daily supervision by a dedicated team of clinical educators, ad hoc supervisors, GSH clinicians and Mrs Shamila Manie of the division of Physiotherapy, who teaches the ICU module made the completion of this critical area possible. " This ICU rotation has truly been the best clinical experience of my entire UG clinical exposure. The support by supervisors and the daily reflective and de-briefing space provided during the ICU block has been the best" Tomasz Ruzyczka De Rosenworth- final year Physiotherapy student.



In the postgraduate diploma of disability studies, we responded initially with running zoom sessions as a means of support to ascertain how students were coping with handling of COVID challenges and course requirements and from these zoom sessions, were able to adjust course deadlines so students could keep up. We negotiated with students to replace our one-week face to face week that precedes online learning in each course with weekly online sessions. Shorter live sessions on Zoom (3 hrs) over a longer period (8 weeks) as opposed to a one-week face-to-face session week in the classroom followed by online written submissions and chat. There was recording of PowerPoints with audio lectures which were available to student before sessions. In face-to-face sessions key issues were highlighted by lecture and questions from and discussions with students. Lecturers used WhatsApp to support students with mental health challenges as a result of COVID and then referred them to UCT student wellness.

Lectures were delivered online using voice narrated PowerPoints in a flip the classroom strategy to get students to engage with the materials beforehand which is showing better engagement among students and support for learning. All teaching online using Zoom.



# IMPACT OF COVID-19

COVID-19 stretched us all to move in new and innovative ways to support each other, our students and the people we work with. In the Division of Occupational Therapy (OT) and through collaborations in the Inclusive Practices Africa Research Unit, we have amongst many others, engaged in two projects to reach out and support.

- Promoting COVID-19 Safe Play Play, the primary occupation of children, was at a risk of being immensely affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recognising that play always matters, four colleagues in the division of occupational therapy collaborated with Inclusive Practices Africa to create an information resource for community volunteers and parents. Through presenting strategies to promote childrens' engagement in play and support and their caregivers' participation especially during the challenges of level 5 lockdown, it offered suggestions for promoting wellbeing. Children within marginalised communities often have to navigate multiple challenges. Once level 5 lockdown was implemented, schools, earlychildhood centers and day centers closed down and this was often the place where kids were offered a nutritional meal and a safe space to play and learn. The need for food security was exacerbated during this time and many NGO's stepped in to provide kids with warm meals. As a group, we saw the opportunity to share the play information resource with the Cape Action Network Groups, an initiative that was started during lockdown to bring together solidarity kitchens, various support networks in one group on Facebook. Many area-specific/ neighbourhood CAN groups started across the Cape Metropole.
- Promoting practice innovations and possibilities in the cluster of child learning, development and play (CLDP) Those of us working with students who were expecting to complete learning activities on the clinical platform, had to think quickly about how to create these opportunities given that many of our sites could not accommodate our students for the full duration of their practice learning engagements. In the division of OT, the CLDP cluster restructured their practice learning activities to include a morning session on Fridays during which various different OTs working in the field have come to present on their innovative work in the field. These talks titled Practice innovations and possibilities have proved to be a great success encouraging students to imagine different ways in which they could contribute using their unique OT skills and experiences..



## DIVISIONAL HEADS



**Associate Professor Helen Buchanan,  
Head of Division of Occupational Therapy**

"It's hard to believe that it's already the end of November and my first year as head of division is almost done. It certainly has been a roller-coaster of a year! Along with the many hours of planning and replanning for our students to be able to continue their teaching and learning activities, staff in the OT division have managed to find time to remain productive in research and scholarship and develop new initiatives to reach out to communities during lockdown and beyond. It is so good to end the year almost fully staffed, with the addition of Elvin Williams who started on 1 October, and the process of filling Elelwani's post under way.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all members of the division - permanent, contract and ad hoc / staff - for the ways in which you all stepped up to the many challenges we have faced this year. I believe that working as a team is what has enabled us to get to this point. I wish you all a wonderful holiday; I hope it will be a time of restoration, enjoyment and quality time with family and loved ones." Helen



**Mrs Sumaya Gabriels,  
Acting Interim Head of the Division of Disability Studies.**

I want to send a heartfelt appreciation to staff at the Disability Studies Division who have shown outstanding resilience, understanding and creativity from the onset of COVID-19 lockdown and continue to do so. From the care shown to students across our programmes to the understanding and support shown to one another. This has helped minimise the negative impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown. A special thanks to you all. A huge thank you to Ike Nwanze for stepping in to steer the division during the 2 months of Sumaya's study leave. Once again thank you to Lebo and Harsha for the leadership they have provided during the last 6 months. I appreciate that Prof Theresa Lorenzo will be taking over headship and providing stability for the next 2 years, that will allow us to continue the good work of the division". Sumaya

The Division is graduating two PhD students in December 2020:

Michelle Botha for her groundbreaking work on "Ideology and discourse in South African rehabilitation services for visually impaired persons" and Amani Karisa for his outstanding work on "Understanding father involvement in the education of learners with intellectual disabilities in a special school in Kenya; a case study".



# DIVISIONAL HEADS



**Dr Nicki Fouché,**  
**Head: Division of Nursing and Midwifery**

Nicki donned her nurse's uniform and assisted in giving the flu vaccine to the retirees in the Pinelands area. One of the advantages of wearing her uniform is that she did not have to stand in the queue at Pick and Pay!

**Victories:** 2 PhD, 3 Masters by dissertation (2 with distinction), 1 Masters by course work and minor dissertation and 4 MNCN With the PGDips we have graduated a full house from our programmes this year.

Dr Sheila Clow has supervised a PhD to graduation as well as a Masters by course-work/minor dissertation. One of Sheila's Masters graduates from 2014 graduated with a PhD from Griffiths University, Australia. During lockdown and in between working on the curriculum for training of Clinical Nurse Specialists, Sheila had 2 publications and another 2 are in the pipe-line. As Masters and PhD convenor, Sheila and the team completed a review and revision of the rules of three Masters programmes. She has been working in a volunteer capacity as a case investigator and contact tracer for the provincial Covid-19 response team since the beginning of April. Sheila's 'pod' covers the Khayelitsha and Eastern substructures of the Cape Town metro but often there is overlaps with other metro subdistricts and provincial districts. This has been challenging as many of the people contacted were living in very challenging situations and one had to work with them to try and find ways for them to isolate effectively. The work has also involved interacting with employers (in terms of human resource support and management, and environmental management for workplaces, factories etc.) as well as schools and undertakers. Sometimes one has had to intervene across provincial boundaries to ensure that individuals at risk maintained their treatments and the monitoring of their treatments was not interrupted. We have also acted as a training pod for a new UWC pod as they anticipated students returning to campus.

Dr Tania de Villiers has managed to get 2 publications accepted and is awaiting confirmation of others. She has spent a considerable amount of lockdown time to finalise a Mentorship Course for nurses and continues with designing a GBV course open to all.

Almost 3 years of ongoing re-curriculating, the Division's 6 postgraduate diploma for the training of clinical nurse specialists was finally sent to the SA Nursing Council. This task has taken considerable dedication from the team - congrats to all.

Two of our Masters students were on the frontline during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of their big concerns was that they were behind in the proposal writing!

Unfortunately, 2 postgraduate nursing students contracted COVID and were treated accordingly and are now fully recovered.

2020, The Year of the Nurse and Midwife has proved that nurses are heroes and we as a Division, are still nurses at heart. I could not ask for a more cohesive and dedicated team during the heavy lockdown.

Nicki



# DIVISIONAL HEADS



**Associate Professor Niri Naidoo,  
Head: Division of Physiotherapy**

I would like to express my very deep gratitude to all in the Division of Physiotherapy, and the support of our HOD and colleagues in the DHRS for having met the many challenges, especially those presented in these last few months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

All your efforts have uplifted our students, our Division and most of all, you have supported the efforts of each other with your love, care, guidance and support. Furthermore, amidst these trying times, colleagues have received accolades for which we are extremely proud:

Ad hom promotions in 2020:

Ilse du Plessis: Senior Clinical Educator

Theresa Burgess: Associate Professor

Gillian Ferguson: Associate Professor

Additional prestigious awards were also received by:

A/Professor Gillian Ferguson who received the Teaching At Universities (TAU) Fellowship, and

A/Professor Theresa Burgess has been re-elected to serve on the National Ministerial Ethics Board.

I am deeply grateful and proud as I stand alongside our Physiotherapy Team. I wish you all well and a restful time for the festive season and look forward to our continued work together to produce the most competent Physiotherapy graduates, and the support and upliftment of colleagues to greater heights.

Be well and take care.

Niri

# DIVISIONAL HEADS



**Dr Michal Harty**  
**Head: Division of Communication Sciences & Disorders**

Who knew in January 2020 when I took over from Associate Prof Michelle Pascoe that within 10 weeks we would have 100+ days of hard lockdown, transition to working from home and pivot to a new world of remote emergency teaching! This year has certainly had its challenges, but for this reflection, I want to focus on some of CSDs biggest

achievements in 2020, despite (and sometimes perhaps because of) the COVID 19. I am incredibly proud of the CSD team as well as our students. Firstly, I would like to thank our class reps, particularly the 3rd and 4th year class reps for the stellar work this year in being the interface between our department/division, the faculty and then students! You have done us proud! We have also celebrated with staff with a number of achievements, Vera Hlayisi was appointed to the mail and Guardian list of top 200 young South Africans. Lucretia Petersen was elected as Chair of the South African Association of Audiologists. In terms of our research, Harsha and her team were awarded a NRF grant for work around early communication development, Michelle Pascoe and her team were shortlisted for the Newton Prize for sustainable projects which address the specific needs of low and middle income countries.

Then, there are a number of projects, both student led and staff led which show how responsive we have been to opportunities the pandemic has offered us. Three come to mind. The first is a student-led project to translate informational material about the COVID virus into the newest official language in SA, sign language. The

second is the re conceptualisation of our joint speech and audio course seminars in speech and hearing sciences which was led by Dr Kristen Abrahams and facilitated by a group of our CEs, academic staff and post grad students! We

are certainly excited to see how this can be carried forward in 2021. The third is an exciting project to develop contextually relevant video material lead by Dr Carol Legg for which she award awarded a UCT teaching grant, which arose, in part, due to the limitations we experienced in the move to remote teaching and the restrictions we encountered on sharing of existing video materials for teaching purposes.

Then to the CSD exco team, Vivienne Norman, Christine Rogers, Jane Le Roux and Nikki Keeton, as well as Keanan Fortuin, and Noami Lenders- there is no way I could have lead the team this year without your unwavering support in me! Thank you! Finally, to all the staff who called CSD home this year- we planned and then replanned and then replanned again; we took brave chances and got really comfortable acknowledging that we didn't have the answers. In many instances we did it scared, but we did it anyway!

At the end of day it is this, the courage of CSD staff and students, that continues to inspire me, in my role as HoDiv, to do better and be better! It's a privilege to lead this amazing and talented team.

Michal



# PORTFOLIO HEADS

## Chair of DUEC: Dr Matumo Ramafikeng

As the incoming Chair of this committee, I would like to thank the outgoing Chair A/P Soraya Maart for the foundational work she has done in this committee. Among others, she started the process of drawing the Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the committee and I have continued on that mission. Terms of reference are very important in providing direction for the committee, as well as clarifying our role both as a committee and individually as committee members.

On that note, I would like to say, watch the space; revised terms of reference are on their way at the beginning of 2021. I would appreciate your input as this is what we will use as our GPS going forward.

To the Department, as a Chair of DUEC, I would greatly appreciate your support both to me and the members of DUEC, our undergraduate education went through a whirlwind during COVID-19 and there are lessons learned that we could take forward. I look forward to working well with all of you for the next three years of my term. Thank you.

## Chair of the Postgraduate Committee: Dr Pam Gretschel

"The Departmental PG committee has been hard at work in 2020, drawing on our creative energy to shift our teaching content and supervision support to an online format.

We have faced these challenges with a commitment to support our postgraduate students. During this year, the DHRS PG committee have had two combined meeting with the DHRS Research committee and this has really helped to shape our collective vision for research and postgraduate studies in the DHRS.

Our strategic vision is focused on two key areas:

1. Entering and being in the postgraduate space
2. Development and support during postgraduate studies

Some of our current projects linked to these two key areas include the following:

- Developing the PG VULA site including links to a host of resources to support and guide students during their postgraduate studies, monitoring and refinement of post graduate quality assurance measures, and revisioning of doctoral student support programmes.

We are currently in the midst of planning for PG orientation in 2021 and look forward to welcoming new students to the Department in February 2021."

# PORTFOLIO HEADS

## Chair of the Transformation Committee: Mrs Lucretia Petersen

"This year has been challenging on many fronts for all of us but also brought with it new opportunities, development and a heightening awareness of the inequalities that exist around us. As a committee, we are looking forward to engagements in the department that put transformation at the core of what we do to."

## The newest committee: DHRS Social Responsiveness Committee:



**Jay Chohan**



**Nomusa Ntinga**



**Leigh Ann Richards**

It is with pleasure introduce the DHRS Social Responsiveness Committee members, Jay Chouhan, Nomusa Ntinga and Leigh Ann Richards. This committee forms part of the existing Transformation committee. They are passionate and committed in highlighting all the wonderful Social Responsiveness projects that have been going un-noticed in the Divisions and hope to add a vibrant and sustainable vision to Social responsiveness (SR) in our Department. This year saw the formation of the SR committee but also the realisation of the wonderful and amazing 2020 Covid themed Social Responsiveness projects that took place. This team felt honoured in putting this report together and would like to encourage all DHRS colleagues to look forward to the new year and see the possibilities of creating more SR Projects that will make the difference that we would like to see in the world.

# PORTFOLIO HEADS

## Chair of the Research Committee: A/Professor Gillian Ferguson

"The COVID-19 Pandemic has forced all of us to look at things in a different way. This has inspired us to explore new research ideas and develop new ways of conducting research in challenging circumstances. Despite the multiple changes brought by this pandemic, our research hub continues to grow. Our talented department, dedicated staff and driven students have adapted well to the new circumstances so that we may continue with our work. We could not accomplish any of the remarkable achievements without the support of our colleagues, leadership and student's diligence and creativity.

Thank you all for your dedication, hard work, and flexibility during this uncertain time."

## Chair of the Wellness Committee: Ms Hanske Flieringa

Here we are - at the end of 2020. When looking back on this unimagined year...One tends to feel on the one hand, that it is hard to believe that we are in December already, a long year of 262 days and counting in lockdown! On the other, it may feel as we have endured a decade in one breath. COVID-19 lockdown and its uncertainties did not only lay bare the injustices along the historical fault lines of oppressive logic but also perhaps for all of us, along the fault lines of buried and unfronted angst.

However, WE did make it! We reached the top of the 2020 hill! We must therefore take a deep breath, turn around, and truly witness with appreciation what we have accomplished online as well as face to face, masks and all. We must also celebrate that our students have not only finished their academic year, but with irrevocable evidence of doing so with roaring success. In thinking about what we can take with us into 2021 to re-calibrate our perspectives, we can draw on some wise words of Carolyn Myss on making little choices every day which have major consequences:

- Choose to live a life of integrity. Be honest, communicate effectively, and be kind. Walk your talk and do not deceive anyone - including yourself.
- Choose to pass on your wisdom rather than your suffering. Healing means to refuse what happens or defeats you.
- Every word carries a universe of meaning. Therefore, choose words wisely and choose better words for blaming others or being entitled.
- Choose to get up every morning with gratitude and love and, bless the day.

In the coming year, the committee would like to encourage innovative reflection among colleagues around the impact of 2020 stressors on the health and wellness of the department. We also welcome suggestions from our colleagues around how we can take this forward.

We would also like to take this opportunity to welcome Shireen Damonse and Zari Syed to the Committee. Wishing you all a wonderful and peaceful recess with your families and friends. Stay safe!

# TEDI PROJECT

## TEDI/IDEA PROJECT:

The second half of this year has seen the end of the Teacher Empowerment for Disability Inclusion (TEDI) project and the birth of the Including Disability in Education in Africa (IDEA) Research Unit. The TEDI project's highlight of the year was the online symposium held in July where we were able to showcase our achievements and successes together with many stakeholders and colleagues. TEDI also established a professional association aimed at the advancement of inclusive and equitable education in South Africa, with a particular focus on - but not limited to - the inclusion of disabled persons. Thus, the Association for the Advancement of Inclusive and Equitable Education in South Africa (AAIEESA) was born in the second half of 2020. The purpose of AAIEESA is to create a platform for participating members to formulate and provide expert guidance and advice to role players in the field of education (e.g. State departments, Educational institutions, Educators) in order to improve inclusivity and equity in education and learning in South Africa.

The TEDI project came to an official end in July and evolved into the Including Disability in Education in Africa (IDEA) Research Unit. In October the IDEA Research Unit together with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) hosted a webinar titled "Disability Inclusion in Teacher Education and Development in South Africa". The webinar was funded by the IDEA research unit and was attended by over 200 participants through the course of the morning and early afternoon.

The primary objective of the IDEA Research Unit is to continue the work of the TEDI project, act as hub for future research in inclusive education in Africa and beyond, to promote networking and to carry out training within this field. It is envisaged that the Unit will be a catalyst to further ideas and knowledge as well as promote and strengthen the area of inclusive education locally, nationally, regionally, and globally.

## DHRS IMBIZO

The leadership framework imbizo for DHRS took place on 18 November 2020 and was facilitated by Prof Lucy Gilson. The HOD was grateful for the level at which Lucy steered the engagement and the a positive conversation overall, amongst other (1) Hierarchy is still a big concern and (2) Why are we rewarded through promotions where we need to sell ourselves and not through acknowledgement. EXCO will take on the existing leadership framework structure and challenge it to incorporate it into the PDP process into the HR174 discussions.

### Next Action Steps:

- The LF should shape around how we deal with succession as the HOD term comes to an end.
- Have a facilitated conversation on what we want or look at in leadership in terms of the next DHRS HEAD.
- The date for the next Imbizo will be communicated early in 2021.

# DHRS RECOGNITION

- **Congratulations to our successful Ad Hom applicants:**
  - Dr Niri Naidoo - promotion to Associate Professor
  - Dr Theresa Burgess - promotion to Associate Professor
  - Dr Gillian Ferguson -promotion to Associate Professor
  - Ms Ilse Du Plessis -promotion to Senior Clinical Educator
- Congratulations to Janine Verstraete, Lebogang Ramma and Jennifer Jelsma publish the newly developed toddler and Infant (TANDI) Health Related Quality of Life Measure in the Journal of Patient Reported Outcomes.
- Dr. Kristen Abrahams was awarded the NRF postdoctoral scarce skills fellowship. She began her postdoctoral fellowship in the DHRS just before the 2nd term under the guidance of Prof Kathard
- Congratulations to our Director, **A/Prof Lebogang Ramma** on attaining a C-rating from the National Research Foundation! This is a wonderful achievement to mark your success as an esteemed researcher in your field. Well done!!!
- Congratulations to the DHRS Core Group, Melissa Francke, Dr Kristen Abrahams, Liesl Peters, Leticia Rustin and Genevieve Gonsalves have been successful in obtaining a R10,000.00 social responsiveness teaching and learning grant. The work will be centered around transdisciplinary approaches within our community placement sites that the core group is currently supervising at. This is a pilot project that will be reported on to the larger DHRS Community Group throughout 2021.
- We also want to take this opportunity to congratulate our newly elected HSSC health and rehab representatives and thank our outgoing HSSC representatives for their efforts in serving the department.
- We acknowledge A/Prof Soraya Maart's involvement in the World Physiotherapy Webinar focusing on the challenges in clinical training for Physiotherapists. A policy brief on physical activity during COVID-19: adults, children and people with disability.
- Congratulations to A/Prof Theresa Burgess for her reappointment for 3 years to the National Health Research Ethics Council (NHREC).
- Congratulations to A/Prof Gillian Ferguson for being awarded a Teaching Advancement at Universities (TAU 3) Fellowship: 2021-2022.

# WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

“As we acknowledge World Mental Health Day”



The 10th of October is World Mental Health Day and is aimed at creating awareness to issues related to mental health as a universal priority. As we observe this day in health care, Lebo invited me to share my reflection with colleagues in the department about why we need to recognize the significance of mental well-being as a collective. It is becoming increasingly clear that the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of global populations is more devastating than was initially anticipated. Additionally, leading health organizations have suggested that mental health illness such as depression and anxiety may be the leading cause of disease burden in coming years. The psychological impact of a pandemic has the potential to cause as well as exacerbate already present symptoms of mental ill-health experienced by the general population. I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on the influence of COVID-19 on the mental health of student populations and educators in higher education.



With the rapid infiltration of COVID-19 into societies worldwide in 2020, educators within higher education became more aware of the plight of student populations within a South African context. We constantly sat back thinking about what our students were dealing with, considering their varying psychosocial as well as economic and technological limitations. As educators in the DHRS, we continue to work tirelessly to consistently consider how our students are being affected and how we can mitigate these challenges. There are days when some of us don't even stop for a meal or glance up at family members who surround us. We were constantly considering: How are our student populations coping with the various measures being implemented in South Africa to avoid transmission of the disease, which includes the abrupt changes to their educational activities? How did restrictions like social distancing, food insecurity, the presence of military and lack of supplies impact the mental health of students? The extreme restrictions mandated by governments worldwide resulted in occupational disruption, a pause in the engagement of critical occupations that, under normal circumstances, ensure the well-being of individuals and their families.

# WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

*Continued.....*

As educators within DHRS in various disciplines in a South African context, we all have a unique perspective and practice of cultural competence. In relation to the experience from my division, occupational therapy educators have been working consistently to consider how the break in occupational engagement impacts on the overall mental health and well-being of students at UCT. Occupational therapy educators are resources in the department who are sensitive to the occupational needs of students and educators affected by the pandemic. We are equipped to develop mental health plans to accommodate the disruption caused by a pandemic like COVID-19. I am hopeful that we can work in a collaborative manner to promote positive mental health and reduce the risk of harm associated with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. I strongly believe that the mental health of educators needs to be held as sacred. We need to start mobilizing to take action in these trying times. The stress levels we are experiencing are not the norm and that fundamental truth needs to be acknowledged. The experiences we are having are magnified stressors compared to what we all navigate daily under normal circumstances. What we are facing now is unprecedented. Educators need to have the confidence in one another to be able to vocalise these above-norm stressors. Support structures are in place at UCT and we need to be proactive in accessing those resources. In the event that staff have ideas about creating new windows of opportunity that encourage a sense of universality in the experiences we are having, please reach out so that we can work together to create those spaces.



We need to display a new form of kindness and empathy that is deeply rooted in understanding. We were, and still are, all part of this process of crisis management that is going to have long lasting effects in the years to come with future cohorts. I would like to encourage all colleagues to take a moment to acknowledge one another in some way, a caring message, a helping hand, anything to exhibit compassion for the sometimes tedious situation we are all facing that holds us in a powerful grip of anxiety. Finally, and most importantly, be kind to yourself.

*Written by Zarina Syed, (MOT, Dip Addiction Care)*

*OT Clinical Educator: Third Year Practice Learning Convenor*

# STAFF

## Welcome!

We WELCOME the following new staff members.

- Elvin Williams - Occupational Therapy Lecturer
- Layla van der Schyff - Occupational therapy Clinical Educator
- Ken Kabongo - Physiotherapy Clinical Educator
- Nicolette Pasqualle - Programme convener for the Higher certificate in Disability Practice

COVID-fund staff :

- Lise Reynecke, Bertha Mbuya, Naiema Razack, Meghan Krenzer and Kirsty Beamish.

## Good Byes!

We say FAREWELL to LAURA RUSSEL and we wish her well in her future endeavours.

After more than 10 years in the Department as a Clinical Educator & Lecturer, Laura will be leaving DHRS at the end of 2020 to take up a post in the UK. Laura will be heading up the Voice/ENT services at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford. Laura, "I am sad to say goodbye to all my amazing colleagues and students at UCT, but also HUGELY excited for this new adventure". The HOD and Staff wishes Laura a bright future, but at the same time sad to loose such a dedicated colleague.

# DHRS COMMUNIQUE

JULY - DECEMBER 2020



**STAY SAFE. SAVE LIVES.**



**DHRS**