



Medical Microbiology Division

# NEWSLETTER

University of Cape Town



**A Closer look at MedMicro:  
Your Inside Scoop on the year 2024!**

## From the TEC Team Desk

A warm welcome to the first edition of our Newsletter where you get to discover the incredible work our team accomplished in 2024.

The Division of Medical Microbiology advances transformation and equality goals, yet faces significant challenges due to reliance on soft funding and institutional oversight in creating salaried positions, gender-neutral facilities, and breastfeeding spaces.

It is our hope that continued efforts and collaborations will bear fruits, not just for today, but for generations to come!

## 2024- 2025 Events At A Glance

In 2024, the division's activities aligned with UCT's transformation goals, receiving positive feedback and fostering inclusivity; however, participation and infrastructure improvements remain areas for growth.

Let's take a moment to reflect on all the incredible events and activities we had lined up last year! From empowering women with power walks to stalls of fermented flavors and everything in between, it was truly a memorable celebration. Here's a look back at some of the stand out moments we had in 2024

### Message From the Head of Division

Advancing equity and transformation goals within the Division of Medical Microbiology has been a collaborative yet complex endeavour. These efforts have been shaped by the significant demands placed on clinical and laboratory staff at Groote Schuur Hospital, as well as the constraints faced by soft-funded research personnel.

Successful implementation has required decisive organizational change management, underpinned by the integration of the ancient African philosophy of Ubuntu—"I am what I am because of who we all are."

This philosophy has helped to foster a divisional culture of continuous improvement and behavioural change, rooted in the recognition that progress in equity and transformation directly contributes to broader societal upliftment.

# 2024 Events At A Glance

**Besides Our Monthly TEC Meetings to Chart the Way Forward, Together as MedMicro We Achieved the Following in 2024!**

<b>Outreach activities:</b>
1.STEM exposure to high school learners and students
2.Undergraduate student did internship comprising benchmark (basic workflow towards microbial ID, wrote a “paper”)
3.Youth Day – Career awareness with postgrads
<b>Staff engagement</b>
Awareness activities
Unconscious bias workshop (OIC)
Places and spaces
Posters on door awareness

## Women’s Month - August

In South Africa, August is celebrated as Women’s Month, a time dedicated not just to a single day, but to recognizing and honoring women throughout the entire month. Our division, as always, planned several exciting activities to mark this special occasion. One event that truly stood out was the Power Walk led by Parveen Brown. Before you lace up your walking shoes for 2025, let’s take a closer look at this unique event!



August 2024 - MM ladies gearing up for the Power Walk  
Photo credit :



## Events At A Glance



**Power Walk...**  
A role play activity that encouraged reflection on power, privilege and inclusion

### Power Walk – Inspiring Inclusion At MedMicro

This activity was all about simulating a society where everyone starts off on equal footing – but ends up in different places based on their social position.

During the activity, we discussed unequal power relations that different people experience based on their social identity and how we change these systems. We spoke about repurposing our privilege to help others and being empathetic.

To wrap up our Power Walk activity, participants were treated to beautifully packaged cookies, and we also created a welcoming, women-only safe space (though everyone was invited) for participants to connect, unwind, and share in the spirit of the event (Parveen Brown)

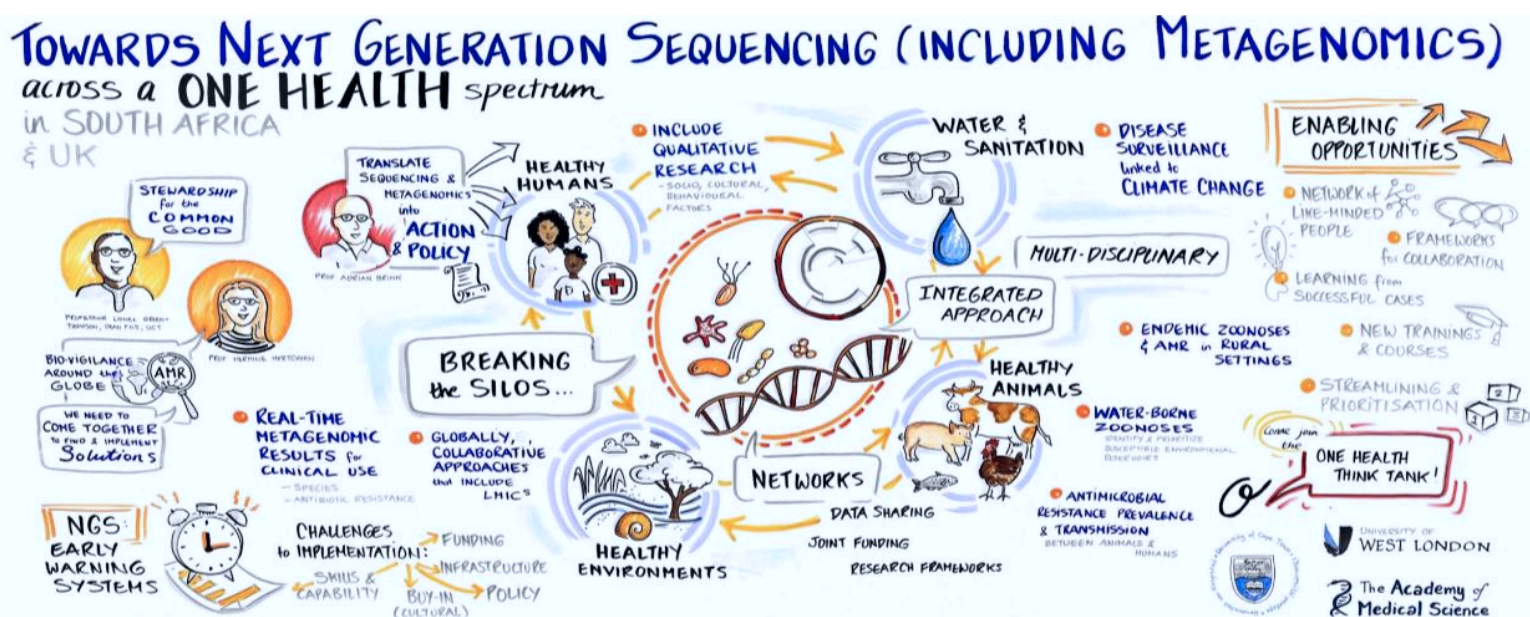
### Heritage Month – September of Fermented Flavors and the X-Factor Award

September is all about celebrating and showcasing our Heritage. True to the spirit of Ubuntu (togetherness) and excellence, our team led by Lynn Paul hosted an incredible table centered around the theme of fermented foods at an event organized by the IDM Transformation Committee.

Our table stood out with a creative selection of fermented delicacies, and to cap off the day we walked away with the prestigious X-Factor Award.



# Departmental Highlights: 2024



Graphic Harvest: Sonja Niederhumer

## One Health Network

The workshop highlighted the need for One Health Surveillance in South Africa's human, animal and environmental sectors, particularly due to the antimicrobial resistance (AMR) burden.

Large-scale farmers and small subsistence farmers, face significant AMR and zoonotic risks, necessitating early outbreak detection to protect public health, especially vulnerable groups like neonates. Next Generation Sequencing (NGS) was identified as a promising early warning tool, with farmer buy-in essential for trust and adoption.

Effective engagement is the first priority, using a bottom-up approach to build trust among stakeholders, including farmers and food producing companies. Addressing cultural resistance to new technologies requires qualitative research, including anthropological and social science methods. Communication through policy and community access is key- in this regard, people science need to be explored.

Challenges include funding, resources, bioinformatics, and policy constraints, but opportunities exist in cross-disciplinary collaboration, consumer-aligned strategies, and leveraging public health impacts. Learning from past health campaigns, such as TB initiatives, can inform engagement strategies. The workshop also emphasized integrating One Health into academic curricula through course development and program alignment.



# In Other News



## *One Health Meeting - University of Cape Town, October 2024*

### **A Journey Through 2024 into 2025 (Lynn Paul)**

The Division of Medical Microbiology has seen progress and loss over 2024 and into 2025. From launching new initiatives such as our emerging One Health collaborative effort with local and international collaborators, to welcoming fresh talent and bidding farewell to valued colleagues, our journey is aimed at continuing valuable contribution to the field of Microbiology, notably with a vision of more inroads in the area of One Health.

We extend a warm welcome to Dr. Ruan Marais and Dr. Ghowa Booley, who join our team of experts, bringing fresh expertise and perspectives. At the same time, we say goodbye to Dr. Amanda Khumalo, who has moved on to new opportunities. We wish her the very best in her next chapter.

This period also marks the arrival of Dr. Stefan Opperman and MSc candidate Ms. Jwalane Sephiri to our Transformation and Equity team; an important step toward strengthening student representation and inclusive growth across the Division.

2025 marked the bittersweet departure of a significant portion of our technical team, closing an era in which a highly skilled research support group played a pivotal role in advancing clinical trials, microbiome studies, and other microbial research projects for Medical Microbiology as well as other UCT researchers.

With deep gratitude, we bid farewell to Dr. Widad Zemanay and the outstanding team of data capturers, clinic staff, and technical staff who facilitated numerous research initiatives for our division and the broader institution. Their contributions have left an enduring legacy, and their fantastic support will be greatly missed.

As we look ahead, our division remains focused on innovation, collaboration, and cultivating a diverse, inclusive environment that empowers every member of our community.



**Newsletter compiled and edited by:**  
**Nyasha Nyakutira**

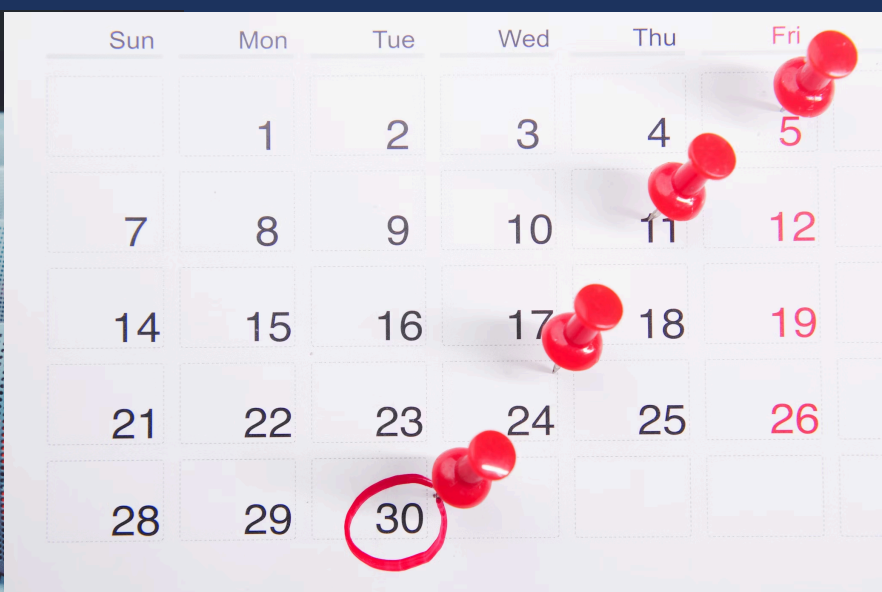
**Have something to share? We welcome contributions for upcoming editions.**

**Please send your submissions to:**

✉ [nyasha.nyakutira@uct.ac.za](mailto:nyasha.nyakutira@uct.ac.za)

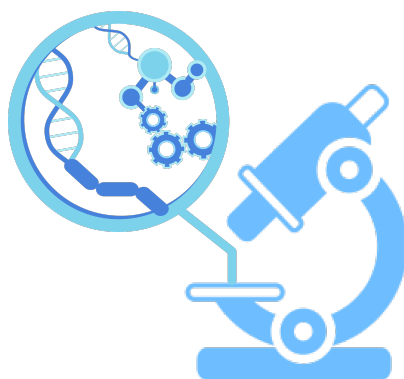
**Contributors:**  
**Widaad Zemanay**  
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**Lynn Paul**  
**Prof Adrian Brink**

## Upcoming Events



**We look forward to upcoming inter-divisional activities within the Department of Pathology. These include Tiny Warrior and “A night at the Pathology museum.”**

**Keep an eye on our emails for more details on dates and Time**



**Thank you for reading, until next time.**