

FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES

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At the Faculty of Health Sciences on the Tygerberg Campus, 2010 was marked by a closer alignment of the Faculty's strategic goals with those of the University. This was especially evident in our contributions to the HOPE Project and in our increased focus on the sustainability of our endeavours in the areas of teaching and learning, research and interaction with the community.

A focal point in this regard was the preparations needed to turn the Faculty's Ukwanda rural training platform into South Africa's first fully-fledged rural clinical school (see page 50). Already, construction has started in Worcester on an academic and administrative building and on student accommodation (estimated cost R60 million). The Ukwanda Rural Clinical School (RCS) will allow our first 9 student volunteers to complete their final year of health care training at the Worcester regional hospital and other rural hospitals in the Western Cape in 2011. All health sciences students have been receiving exposure to rural training, ranging from two to six weeks per annum; from 2012, however, the University plans to select 30 students per annum to complete their final year of training in a rural environment. The RCS is expected to give the University the leverage to drive sustainable rural development by engaging with strategic partners in the Overberg district and in the eastern half of the Cape Winelands district.

Rural training gained further momentum when the Faculty's Medical Education Partnership Initiative received a \$10 million boost. This was part of a multimillion dollar project of the United States aimed at stepping up the number of health professionals in sub-Saharan Africa. The grant made to SU will be applied to build capacity in medical education and research training at the RCS in Worcester and at other sites in the Western Cape.

During the year, the Faculty continued to emphasize and engage in research valued for its role in the advancement of scientific knowledge, the enhancement of teaching, the improvement of health and health care and the promotion of economic and social development. An important project launched in this regard comprised research focused specifically on nutrition security in rural and peri-urban areas of the Winelands East and Overberg districts of the Western Cape. Nutrition security relates to all of the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals, including the alleviation of hunger and malnutrition, improving education and women's position in society, addressing maternal health and child survival, and establishing effective partnerships for development.

The Community Nutrition Security Project has two broad goals. One is to deepen our understanding of local conditions that may be involved in the persistence of malnutrition in South Africa and the rest of the African continent. The other broad goal is to test policy and programme innovations aimed at setting up conditions conducive to community nutrition security. The project is a major component of the Stellenbosch University Food Security Initiative (FSI). The FSI, itself a wide-ranging initiative within the HOPE Project, is home to community-based nutritional research by various faculties.

Other notable developments in 2009 include sustained growth in publications in accredited journals, adding up to a 44.8% growth over the past four-year cycle. There has also been substantial growth in grant applications, with a concomitant increase in success rates; thus the procurement of large grants (more than R500 000 per grant) has shot up from a total of less than R20 million in 2005 to almost R120 million in 2009 – a sixfold increase. We have also experienced an expansion in the number of clinical research and postdoctoral fellowships, and greater funding for statistical support. A research publishing incentive scheme for young researchers was launched, and is turning out to be very popular and successful.

In research development, two Faculty initiatives may be singled out as the most significant. Firstly, new courses in research methodology have been offered to more than 200 master's students so far. Secondly, the internationally benchmarked new degrees Master of Health Sciences Education and of Clinical Epidemiology have each drawn a significant number of students from other African countries. Postgraduate student numbers rose in 2010 by 9% to a record 1 903.

The Faculty's health services and its other forms of community engagement continued to be well integrated with educational and research programmes, especially in areas such as TB and HIV research. Here, divisions such as the Desmond Tutu TB Centre and the Children's Infectious Disease Clinical Research Unit (KIDCRU) play a major role in development initiatives in the communities in which they operate.