



## A new forum to discuss health economics and genomics in South Africa

**To the Editor:** We are pleased to inform the *SAMJ* Editor and readers of a new discussion forum at the University of Pretoria (UP). Launched in 2021, the Health Economics and Genomics Discussion Forum (HEGDF@UP) focuses on strengthening health economics with a particular focus on non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including congenital disorders and rare diseases. These first NCDs experienced in life are emerging as a significant health issue as South Africa continues to transition epidemiologically.

The triannual HEGDF@UP aims to establish a transdisciplinary, inter-institutional, academic industry network to support collaboration and inform policy. The inaugural HEGDF@UP took place in June 2021, where the keynote address, 'The relevance of economic analysis applied to healthcare and health systems: What is needed and what happens if we don't have it?' was presented by Prof. Alex van den Heever, Chair of Social Security Systems Administration and Management Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand. The second HEGDF@UP was held in November 2021, offering perspectives on non-invasive prenatal testing (NIPT) from patients and a health insurance scheme, as well as from government, represented by Dr Nicholas Crisp, Director-General (Acting), National Department of Health. In addition to the combined over 200 participants who were present at these two events, post-event participation includes 550 YouTube views and 3 900 impressions to date. Three further HEGDF@UP events are planned for 2022 (May, July and October) and will focus on the benefits and other key issues related to health economic evaluation in genetics and genomics. These HEGDF@UP events will continue to be livestreamed in partnership with Future Africa as a research institute and platform at UP.

The HEGDF@UP is one component of wider collaboration between UP and Ampath Laboratories under the umbrella of a mutually beneficial 5-year agreement initiated in 2019 to drive translational research and innovation, supported by collective expertise and infrastructure. This initiative straddles the Health Sciences and Natural and Agricultural Sciences faculties at UP, in collaboration with Prof. Steve Koch of the Department of Economics. The collaboration combines Ampath's interest in health economics with

that of key UP faculty members, such as Dr Astrid Turner, to further develop health economics within health sciences. Collectively, this partnership aims to promote knowledge exchange and innovation to ultimately improve the health and wellness of South Africans and those further afield on the continent.

The appointed UP-Ampath Chair, Prof. Liza Bornman, oversees postgraduate and post-doctoral researchers to promote participation in collaborative projects across disciplines. Internships for science graduates pursuing registration as health scientists at the Health Professions Council of South Africa and exchange programmes for genetic counsellors in training are also underway.

Developing health economics capacity at UP includes economic evaluation of specific interventions that are the standard of care in high-income countries, for input into wider health technology assessments. The HEGDF@UP provides a platform for discussion and consideration of these and related issues, as a further tool for decision-makers in allocating healthcare resources.

To access links to previous HEGDF@UP events, please visit <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLd6FME3D1tzOLb8RM-wujk0PCvr0aGxvZ>

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