

## Fostering integrated, holistic, and responsive health professions education in Africa

As the African Journal of Health Professions Education enters the final quarter of 2024, we are reminded of the significant strides made across the continent to advance health professions education. The September issue reflects a diverse array of research that not only addresses the immediate educational needs of students in health professions but also provides frameworks and insights with long-term implications for improving health outcomes on the African continent. The articles featured in this issue share a common theme: the critical importance of integrated, holistic, and responsive approaches in health professions education.

### Enhancing interprofessional learning through community health workers

The article by Joubert and Reid presents a framework for the inclusion of community health workers (CHWs) in interprofessional learning (IPL) teams. This framework, which is validated by stakeholder input, emphasises the need for CHWs to receive targeted and culturally-relevant training to effectively contribute to IPL teams. The article underscores that CHWs should not be relegated to paraprofessional roles but should instead, be equipped with a comprehensive understanding of interprofessional collaboration. This approach is particularly relevant in the African context, where CHWs play a pivotal role in delivering healthcare, often in under-resourced settings. By integrating CHWs into IPL teams, we can enhance healthcare delivery and improve health outcomes across communities.

### Addressing the complexities of Obstetrics clinical learning environments

Ntsekhe-Mogashoa, Nyoni, and Labuschagne explore the complex, and often challenging, obstetrics clinical learning environment. Through a thorough exploration of undergraduate medical students' experiences, the study identifies seven priority areas that require attention to optimise thoroughly exploring. These priorities extend beyond procedural skills to include collaborative practice and psychological preparation - crucial for students operating in high-stress and emotionally-charged environments like obstetrics. The findings from this study are vital for educators in Africa, where maternal and neonatal health remains a significant public health concern.

### Promoting inclusive education through multimodal teaching and learning

The study on multimodal teaching and learning (MTL) in higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa explores the perspectives of undergraduate nursing students on the challenges they face with MTL, particularly in the context of achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 on quality education. The challenges highlighted, such as connectivity issues and unapproved platforms, are pertinent to many HEIs across Africa, where the digital divide continues to pose significant barriers to education. The findings call for innovative instructional techniques and ongoing teacher training to improve the quality of online teaching, learning and assessment.

### Supporting first-year medical students in coping with transition

The support framework to facilitate first-year undergraduate medical students' social learning and integration skills addresses students' emotional and communication challenges during their transition from high school to university. Given the rigorous demands of medical education and the stress associated with this transition, the framework's focus on under-preparedness, peer support and self-management is particularly relevant. Implementing such a framework can enhance student retention and success, which is critical in producing competent healthcare professionals in Africa.

### Evaluating educational methodologies: lectures vs. peer-assisted learning

Oppong, Kwakye, Kumi and Quartey examine allied health students' perceptions of lectures and peer-assisted learning (PAL) as educational strategies. The findings reveal that while students generally perceive both methodologies positively, PAL is particularly valued for providing active educational experiences. This insight is important for health professions educators who are continually seeking to balance traditional lecture methods with more interactive and student-centered approaches. Incorporating PAL into the standard curriculum can enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

### Integrating spirituality into Unani Tibb education

The study on the role of spirituality and spiritual care education in South Africa reveals a gap between the holistic patient care philosophy of Unani Tibb and the lack of formal integration of spirituality in its education. Participants view spiritual care as integral to Unani Tibb, highlighting the need to incorporate spiritual concepts into the curriculum to maintain the integrity of this holistic approach. This finding has broader implications for health professions education in Africa, where integrating cultural and spiritual dimensions into healthcare training can enhance the relevance and effectiveness of healthcare delivery.

### Nursing students' knowledge and attitudes towards geriatric care

The study on undergraduate nursing students' knowledge of ageing, attitudes towards older people and their intention to work with older people after graduation, highlights a concerning trend: senior students show a declining interest in working with older adults, despite having a significant knowledge base. This finding is particularly relevant in Africa, where the ageing population is growing, and there is an increasing need for well-prepared nurses to address the complex health needs of older adults. More research is needed to understand the factors contributing to this declining interest and to develop strategies to encourage nursing students to pursue careers in geriatric care.

### Conclusion

The articles in this issue collectively emphasise the importance of a holistic and integrated approach to education for health professionals in Africa. Whether through the inclusion of CHWs in IPL teams, the optimisation

of clinical learning environments, the promotion of multimodal teaching, the support of first-year medical students, the integration of spirituality, or the encouragement of nursing students to care for the elderly, these studies provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers and practitioners. As we continue to navigate the complexities of health professions education in Africa, it is imperative that we remain responsive to the evolving needs of

our students and the communities they serve. By doing so, we can ensure the next generation of healthcare professionals is well-equipped to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

**Editor-in-Chief**

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