


Curiosity does not kill the cat ... it cultivates the clinician

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Why was the idea necessary?

As a first-year medical student at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in 2022, I initially felt disillusioned. The early curriculum, centred on foundational sciences such as physics, chemistry and biology, evoked memories of high school instead of the desired clinical medicine. I joined the Wits Students' Physician Society (WSPS) with the goal of feeling more connected to the medical profession. Through WSPS, I engaged with senior peers who provided better insight into the structure of our training.

While we are gradually exposed to patients and clinical cases, a lingering sense of dissatisfaction remains. Medicine is inherently complex, filled with atypical presentations and rare conditions. Yet these are often under-represented in the curriculum, which rightly focuses on the local burden of disease and common conditions. Although some rare and intriguing cases do occur in South African hospitals, we are unlikely to encounter them or explore them in depth during our clinical



Andomia Papavarnava is a fourth-year medical student at the University of the Witwatersrand. Her passion for patient-centred care and child health inspires her interests in internal medicine and paediatrics. Through volunteer work and involvement in various initiatives, she hopes to contribute meaningfully to the medical field and continue growing as a compassionate, research-driven clinician.

years. A clear need among students for exposure to exceptional cases that stretch clinical reasoning and inspire curiosity led to the creation of the event called Curious Cases.

What was tried?

In September 2022, WSPS hosted the first Curious Cases, featuring three internal medicine specialists. Each speaker introduced their field and presented a memorable, unusual case they had personally encountered. Presentations included symptomatology, diagnostic challenges, investigations, differential diagnoses and treatment plan. Importantly, speakers also highlighted how their diagnostic approach differed from managing more common conditions, ultimately providing key learning moments for attendees.

To ensure smooth execution, presentations were co-ordinated in advance and event materials were centrally compiled. We promoted the event on social media and student networks to encourage attendance and build excitement. While refreshments and small speaker gifts added to the atmosphere, the core strength of the event lay in its engaging, interactive learning format.

What were the lessons learnt?

The educational value of Curious Cases quickly became evident. The inaugural event included fascinating cases in rheumatology, infectious diseases and gastroenterology. The structured breakdown of rare cases allowed students to apply theoretical knowledge in a clinically meaningful way. As a first-year student, I found the experience deeply motivating and it served as a reminder of why I chose to study medicine.

Following positive feedback and sustained interest, Curious Cases has evolved to become an anticipated annual event. Over 3 years, attendance has more than doubled, and the speaker panel has expanded to include multiple internal medicine subspecialists along with distinguished guests. Its growing reputation secured sponsorship from a major South African medical aid scheme, which now supports event logistics while maintaining content independence. In 2025, a virtual streaming and recording feature will be introduced to improve national accessibility.

Beyond the event itself, students have reported seeking out additional research and clinical experiences, which is a testament to sustained engagement. Additionally, other medical schools have consulted WSPS to replicate the model on their campuses.

Curious Cases demonstrates how student-driven initiatives can meaningfully supplement the medical curriculum. Motivation and critical thinking among medical students are powerfully enhanced with rare and engaging case-based events. After all, curiosity does not kill the cat ... it cultivates the clinician.

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