

## ***Ubuntu* in action: Student societies as catalysts for collaboration and innovation in South African medical schools**

Medical school is as much about developing future doctors as it is about treating patients. Within lecture halls, hospital wards, and student societies, the next generation of clinicians begins to define what it means to serve, lead, and learn. While the formal curriculum trains us to become doctors, it is often student-led societies that cultivate the humanity, innovation, and collaboration essential to medical education.

At the University of the Witwatersrand, the Wits Students' Physician Society (WSPS) exemplifies the value of student-led engagement. As a non-profit, student-run society, WSPS advances internal medicine and paediatrics through professional development, service, and community partnership. The society organises clinical skills workshops and events, volunteer programs at Helen Joseph and Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospitals, and outreach initiatives supporting patients and healthcare partners across Gauteng. Through these activities, WSPS enriches the academic and social life of students, ultimately cultivating clinical competence alongside civic responsibility.

Student societies like WSPS occupy a vital place in medical education. They create communities of shared purpose, where students explore professional interests, reflect on their roles in healthcare, and engage in initiatives that promote both patient care and personal growth. In doing so, they nurture the professional values that underpin compassion and evidence-based medicine.

It is within this culture of engagement that the idea for the South African Undergraduate Medical Research Competition (SUMRC) emerged. Many undergraduate students receive training in research methods but have few opportunities to conduct or publish original work. WSPS collaborated with the University of Cape Town's Internal Medicine Society (UCT MedSoc) to bridge this gap. Together, they launched SUMRC to promote undergraduate research, foster inter-institutional collaboration, and showcase student scholarship.

UCT MedSoc was a natural partner in this endeavour, having established itself as a cornerstone of academic engagement within its faculty. The society fosters academic curiosity, clinical excellence, and professional development among undergraduate students, providing a structured platform for engagement with internal medicine beyond the core curriculum. Central to its mission is promoting undergraduate research to strengthen analytical thinking, clinical reasoning, and an evidence-based approach to practice. Through mentorship, research awareness activities, and collaboration with the Department of Medicine, the society connects students with researchers and facilitates early exposure to scholarly inquiry. In doing so, UCT MedSoc helps cultivate clinicians who are clinically competent, research-informed, and committed to advancing medical knowledge and patient care.

The collaboration between WSPS and UCT MedSoc through SUMRC represents a milestone in student-led medical education. It demonstrates how student societies can supplement the curriculum and expand opportunities for academic and professional growth. The

competition not only stimulated research engagement but also created a sustainable framework for the continued development and recognition of undergraduate research.

The Undergraduate Journal in Health (URJH) plays an essential role in this collaboration. The journal provides the platform for SUMRC while independently handling all editorial and peer review processes, ensuring academic rigor and credibility. In doing so, it offers students a valuable introduction to the scholarly publication process, from submission and review to feedback and selection. By publishing the winning submissions from the inaugural SUMRC, the journal affirms the importance of undergraduate scholarship and reinforces the view that research is integral to medical training, not merely a postgraduate pursuit.

While the journal upholds the integrity of the academic process, WSPS and UCT MedSoc play a central role in engaging students. The societies promote the competition, encourage submissions, and foster enthusiasm for research participation across their institutions. This collaboration between academic mentors and student organisations highlights how institutional support and student initiative can together strengthen a culture of inquiry within medical education.

The success of SUMRC shows what is possible when motivated students are guided by committed academic partners. Such collaborations enrich the undergraduate experience, expand research capacity, and instill a lasting sense of professional purpose. As South African medical schools continue to evolve to meet the demands of modern healthcare, the partnership among WSPS, UCT MedSoc, and URJH stands as a model of innovation, collaboration, and shared commitment to the future of the medical profession.

### **Andonia Papavarnava, Ra'ees De Witt**

*Wits Students' Physician Society, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa*  
2550183@students.wits.ac.za

### **Johann Kok, Xolwe Nokeri**

*UCT Internal Medicine Society, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa*

The following section highlights the results of the inaugural South African Undergraduate Medical Research Competition (SUMRC), which celebrates excellence in undergraduate medical research and collaboration across South African medical schools.

### South African Undergraduate Medical Research Competition (SUMRC) 2025 Results

All submissions underwent editorial checks, followed by a blinded peer review process. After one to two rounds of revisions, the final manuscripts were subjected to blind voting by members of the editorial board.

#### Short Communication Category

**Winner:** *Curiosity Never Killed the Cat* – **Andonia Papavarnava**, University of the Witwatersrand

**Runner-up:** *Empathy, an Enemy of Ethics: Kantianism and Moral Sentimentalism in Practice* – **Muhammad-Yaseen Wadee**, University of the Witwatersrand

#### Review/Research Category

##### Joint Winners:

*Anti-CD20 Monoclonal Antibodies in Chronic Lymphocytic Leukaemia: Mechanisms, Resistance, and the Evolution of Targeted Immunotherapy* – **Amukelani Sambo**, University of the Witwatersrand

*Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for South African Healthcare: Clinical Applications and Ethical Considerations* – **Yudarshan Pillay**, University of the Witwatersrand

**Runner-up:** *Infectious Disease Complications in Children with Cancer* – **Franco Vosloo**, University of the Witwatersrand

##### Notable Mentions:

*Integration of Artificial Intelligence in Intravascular Optical Coherence Tomography* – **Nkanyezi Ngubane**, University of Cape Town

*Bridging the Cardiac Gap: A Literature Review Evaluating Wearable ECG Devices in South Africa's Public Health System* – **Barack Idemudia**, University of the Witwatersrand

The winning articles will be published in this 2025 issue, with the runners-up to follow in the 2026 issues. Remaining entries will continue to be evaluated for publication.