

## Supporting mentorship at grass roots

In this issue we publish the outstanding effort of the winner of the inaugural students' essay competition. Entry was open to all undergraduate students from a Faculty of Health Sciences in South Africa. The remit was to craft a 1 000-word essay on the fundamental threat to global surgery: bacteria resistance to all known antimicrobial agents. The question posed was "how do you envisage the practice of surgery in the era of antimicrobial pan-resistance?" This innovative initiative originated from the enthusiasm of Hlohonolofatso Bookholane, one of the student leaders in the UCT Surgical Society. The advertisement last year attracted five submissions which were evaluated by our Associate Editors in a blind adjudication. The winner was Langelihle Mthembu, a first-year student from the University of the Witwatersrand. His biosketch and those of the joint runners-up are published in this issue while the latter's essays are available online.

This initiative is just one of several which augers well for the future of surgical academia with the realisation that these initiatives must be aimed at undergraduates so that they can fulfill their research potential when entering the ranks of specialisation and to facilitate future academic opportunities.

The spark for the essay came from an active member of the UCT Surgical Society, a society whose success has been in no small part due to the support of Professor Del Khan. The activities of the UCT Society and its international counterparts are remarkable and were chronicled in this journal last year.<sup>1,2</sup> Highlights include hosting the first international congress of surgical student societies in Cape Town, while growing to become the largest student society at UCT and encouraging other South African universities to establish similar student bodies.

The second initiative is the *Aesculapius* (the Roman god of healing and medicine) award for the best student presentation at the Surgical Research Society. This award was conceived

by Dr Ines Buccimazza during her term as President of the Society in 2012. This continues to attract more and more undergraduate students to the annual meeting who present their work conducted during research modules as part of their MB ChB degree.

Another student research initiative, the Clinical Scholars' Programme, is the brainchild of Bongani Mayosi, Dean of The Faculty of Health Sciences at UCT.<sup>3</sup> The concept allows the choice of two undergraduate clinical scientist research tracks, a BSc (Med) Hons or a PhD that are intercalated with the MB ChB degree. These tracks are based on similar programmes offered in the UK and the USA which have been found to be valuable in introducing future clinicians to research and in providing a cadre of highly trained physician-scientists who are likely to be attracted to, and excel in, careers in academic medicine.<sup>4,5</sup>

### REFERENCES

1. Tariq H, Thomson D, Kahn D. 10-year review of Africa's first student surgical society – UCT Surgical Society. SAJS 2017;55(2):6-8.
2. Booth A, Burger S, Scott AJ, Thomson D. The International Association of Student Surgical Societies: A brief history from 2014-2017. SAJS 2017;55(2):2-5.
3. Katz AA, Futter M, Mayosi BM. The intercalated BSc (Med) Honours/MB ChB and integrated MB ChB/PhD tracks at the University of Cape Town: Models for a national medical student research training programme. S Afr Med J 2014;104(2):111-113. DOI:10.7196/SAMJ.7639.
4. McManus IC, Richards P, Winder BC. Intercalated degrees, learning styles, and career preferences: Prospective longitudinal study of UK medical students. BMJ 1999;319(7209):542-546. [<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.319.7209.542>]
5. Cleland JA, Milne A, Sinclair H, Lee AJ. An intercalated BSc degree is associated with higher marks in subsequent medical school examinations. BMC Med Educ 2009;9:24. [<http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/1472-6920-9-24>]