



## **DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR'S COMMUNIQUE**

THE SOUTH AFRICAN ASSOCIATION FOR HEALTH EDUCATIONALISTS CONFERENCE 2013

I am very pleased that staff in the College of Health Sciences hosted the South African Association for Health Educationalists Conference 2013. It is important for us to develop critical mass of activity in key areas of importance to the members of the College, and which will translate into more effective delivery of our core business, as well as improving on Health Science service delivery through increased competency of graduates.

While the College has embraced development of research outcomes, we also need to build on the tradition of excellent Health Sciences Practitioner training, and the College has identified research into our Teaching and Learning as a key strategic area to promote and develop.

There are many challenges facing teaching and learning in the College, some of which result from the particular and peculiar nature of the curriculum and necessary outcomes, some which relate to the legacy effects, and some that are generic issues of teaching and learning in South Africa and globally. There is no question that research into all aspects of Health Sciences Education will add value to the vision and mission of the College.

This conference encouraged a robust and wide discussion by the various groups and defined some key collective problems to address over the next few years. Working together we can innovate in curriculum and practice such that we add value to the teaching and learning activities of the academics and the students.

I am especially proud of the many contributions made by academics based in the College to the Conference which resulted in staff presenting 23 oral presentations, chairing sessions and presenting on 3 posters. I am sure that ongoing commitment to research in this area, and translating it into practice within our teaching and learning, will create a very strong node of activity with global reach and impact. With my own interest and involvement over the years in curriculum development and transformation, I find the innovations summarised in the communique very exciting!

Professor Rob Slotow  
Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Head  
College of Health Sciences

## **THE NEGLECTED GRASS ROOT ADOPTION OF MOBILE PHONES AS 'LEARNING TOOLS' IN RESOURCE-LIMITED SETTINGS**

An insightful presentation on mobile learning and mobile health interventions was delivered by Professor Petra Brysiewicz, UKZN expert in emergency healthcare from the School of Nursing and Public Health.

The study – originating from advanced midwifery education in KwaZulu-Natal –acknowledged that mhealth and mlearning interventions fail because they adopt a techno-centric view and ignore the local context. To address this, the researchers investigated the 'organic' adoption and educational usage of mobile phones by health workers in rural health settings.

The research revealed a number of unexpected learning and teaching practices based on the grassroots adoption of mobile phone functions and in particular, social applications (apps). These practices involved cognitive, teaching and social presence as well as reflective practice and enabled rich educational experiences – according to the Community of Inquiry Theory which was used in the study's methodology.

Brysiewicz explained that 'traditional' communities of inquiry are based on pre-determined online environments. 'By contrast, learners used bundles of phone-based functions/apps to embed mobile and blended communities and other resources that were fragmented across social, temporal, topical, geographical, digital and 'real' spaces in the inquiry process in very dynamic ways.'

It was reported that in view of future mHealth and mobile learning efforts, mobile phones appear to be particularly suitable to facilitate competence development in the following ways:

- problem solving and situated co-construction of local knowledge
- socio-cultural participation, to alleviate professional isolation
- connecting learning in workplaces with formal education systems; and
- addressing unpredictable opportunities and challenges that are typical for the changing and provisional (health) contexts observed

Brysiewicz said: 'Instead of ignoring the revealed practices, health and education institutions are well advised to support learners in media literacy - enabling them to more effectively and critically use existing (mobile) technologies.'



Professor Petra Brysiewicz