

A REFLECTION ON INTEGRATING THE POWER OF TRADITIONAL MEDICAL PRACTICE

WITH MODERN HEALTHCARE



In South Africa, not only does heritage play an integral role in promoting as well as celebrating our cultural diversity and social cohesion, it also serves as the foundation for reconciliation, peace and economic development in our nation.

Our country boasts a wealth of human encyclopedias in every community, who carry with them a high degree of cultural heritage, skill and knowledge that has been passed down for generations. Thus the significance of reclaiming, restoring and preserving this cultural knowledge, in helping us to address the challenges our communities are facing today, cannot be overstated.



IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE CONTINENT AT LARGE, TRADITIONAL MEDICINE IS A COMMON HERITAGE THAT IS SHARED AMONGST ITS PEOPLE.

For centuries traditional medicine and traditional healers have been the backbone of their communities, playing an intrinsic role in healthcare and improving the wellbeing of the communities they serve

To this day, traditional medicine is reported to be serving as the primary source for healthcare to more than 80% of the population on the African continent, according to UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). A large percentage of the population in South Africa live in rural areas where access to western medical facilities is limited, which results in traditional medicines and healers being the main source for the prevention and treatment of diseases for many.

It is therefore necessary for us to cultivate an infrastructure that will enable us to create a hybrid model of delivering healthcare that is accessible, affordable and has traditional medicine entrenched within its framework. Since 2007 significant strides have been made to include traditional health practice in the mainstream healthcare system of South Africa by using the law as a tool for its formal integration.

With the enactment of the Traditional Health Practitioners Act 22 of 2007, a legal framework for traditional health practitioners was established, giving formal recognition to traditional practitioners or healers. The Act also provides the framework for the establishment of the Traditional Health Practitioners' Council of South Africa whose key role is to ensure that health care services that are provided by traditional practitioners are efficient, safe and of the highest standards.

THE ACT ALSO PROVIDES FOR THE MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL OVER THE REGISTRATION, TRAINING AND CONDUCT OF PRACTITIONERS, STUDENTS AND SPECIFIED CATEGORIES IN THE TRADITIONAL HEALTH PRACTITIONERS PROFESSION.

As the Health, Social Development and Veterinary SETA this is invaluable for us and it informs how we can significantly contribute to making sure that the future generations of healthcare professionals who have a keen interest in traditional medicine, have the necessary resources, skills and training to propel it forward.

For several years since 2016, we have been partnering with universities to roll out our Indigenous Knowledge Systems Bursaries. Most recently we awarded three PHD candidates and one Masters candidate from the University of KwaZulu-Natal with Indigenous Knowledge Systems Bursaries to the value of R440 000 in total. From the University of the North West, five



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students were awarded the same bursary to the value of R50 000 each. As we look to the future, we will also continue to collaborate and partner with both private and public sector stakeholders to seek out innovative ways of learning from and integrating our county's rich and unique tapestry of health practices, approaches, knowledge, and beliefs.