

Surgical challenges in Limpopo

Surgical challenges in rural areas are very well documented. The vast geographic area covered by the province of Limpopo is no exception. What is different in Limpopo is that the provincial administration has demonstrated a great interest in and commitment to developing excellent healthcare for all its citizens, albeit from a rather low base.

Recently it has supported the growth and diversification of the various surgical services in the province. New surgical departments are being established, while existing departments are undergoing significant growth.

One of the key components of raising the bar for surgical specialties is close collaboration with the University of Limpopo to advance this academic project.

The Medical School of Limpopo is the latest established and newest of the nine medical schools in South Africa (SA). Needless to say, tremendous challenges had to be overcome in establishing such a medical school. In spite of humble beginnings, the medical school currently graduates ~100 medical doctors annually. About half of these are 'homegrown' MB ChBs; the other half are graduates from the Nelson Mandela – Fidel Castro Medical Collaboration Programme. The latter group undertake their first four - six undergraduate study years in Cuba (and in the Spanish language!), after which they come to Limpopo in order to be introduced to and acquainted with SA clinical medicine. The University of Limpopo is very proud of the progress made over the last decade, the Health Professions Council of South Africa having recently (August 2021) finalised their five-yearly visitation to the University of Limpopo and accredited the Limpopo medical undergraduate training programmes.

In the light of these developments, we judged it timely and appropriate to document a number of achievements of the Department of General Surgery at the University of Limpopo. This special edition of the *SAMJ* consists of three parts:

The *first part* provides a brief historical overview of the Medical School and the Department of Surgery in Limpopo.^[1]

The *second part* consists of four research reports, recently undertaken in the Department of General Surgery in Polokwane and Mankweng, and all pertaining to the growth of the academic project at the University of Limpopo. The first two articles review the number of theatre procedures performed in Limpopo Province during 2019 and the number of patients admitted to the surgical specialties during April 2021.^[2,3] This is followed by a two-year review of patients seen at the Pietersburg and Mankweng hospitals

breast cancer clinic and a review of the profile of molecular subtyping of breast cancer and clinicopathological features.^[4,5]

Finally, the *third part* consists of a number of interesting surgical case reports, to provide an indication of the length and depth of surgical challenges in Limpopo Province. The first three case reports pertain to special cases of breast cancer.^[6-8] These are followed by two unusual cases: a large retrosternally extended thyroid^[9] and a case of a missed diaphragmatic hernia.^[10] The last five cases are all interesting trauma cases, including two cases of paediatric trauma.^[11]

We hope and trust these will enlighten the reader about this exciting and fast-growing surgical department in rural South Africa!

F T Mhlongo

Head of Health, Provincial Government of Limpopo, South Africa

A B (Sebastian) van As

Head of Department of Surgery, Pietersburg Hospital, University of Limpopo, Polokwane, South Africa
sebastian.vanas@uct.ac.za

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