

KZN Department of Health and DUT in ground-breaking orthotics and prosthetics programme

13 November 2014

The lives of scores of people in need of medical orthotics and prosthetic devices (including artificial limbs) will no longer be the same, following the official launch today of a ground-breaking partnership between the KZN Department of Health and the Durban University at Wentworth Hospital (where the academic department is based).

The partnership has given birth to a brand new Medical Orthotics and Prosthetics Department at DUT, which started operating last year (2013), whose primary aim is to increase the number of registered medical orthotists and prosthetics in the country.

Currently there are only about 420 such practitioners in the country.

Medical Orthotics and Prosthetics refers to the design and manufacturing of artificial limbs (prosthetics) and surgical appliances such as splints, external braces and surgical shoes (orthotics) which support joints or body parts. These appliances, to name a few, support patients who have suffered from strokes, neurological injuries as well as provide post-operative support.

Significantly, the net result of this new programme is that needy patients will no longer have to wait for more than a year to receive prosthetic devices, as has been the case for many years.

Historically, the Department has been faced with a serious shortage of professionals with the expertise to design and craft these assistive devices which, according Dr Dhlomo, “bring much-needed dignity, self-reliance, independence as well as economic viability to our people who are not able bodied.”

Dr Dhlomo said: “Through the partnership that we have cemented, we are able to boldly say that the scarcity of ORTHOTICS/ PROSTHETICS professionals is now a thing of the past! Thanks to this partnership, we have the opportunity to make a fresh start in our endeavour to change people’s lives for the better by meeting the demand for these devices.”

Before DUT started this programme, Tshwane University of Technology was the only higher education institution in South Africa offering medical orthotics and prosthetics as a course.

The programme, which cost R35 million in total, will annually see 30 bursary sponsored students - who meet the programme’s selection criteria - being enrolled to study towards a Bachelor of Health Sciences in Medical Orthotics and Prosthetics.

The four-year course will be offered under DUT’s Health Sciences Faculty, with bursaries being offered by the provincial Health Department.

The Programme is based at the newly renovated facility at Wentworth hospital, which includes laboratories, teaching facilities and offices. Here, students will be closer to patients and will receive greater clinical training.

“We hope to start producing professionals who will address service delivery in KZN. Currently, a patient can wait more than a year to get a prosthetic device or limb. We are very excited to be part of the process that will change that situation for the better,” said Greg Bass; DUT Health Sciences Faculty Deputy Dean.

Ends



KZN health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, DUT vice-chancellor Prof Ahmed Bawa and KZN Health Head of Department Dr Sibongile Zungu celebrate the official opening of the Durban University of Technology's Department of Medical Orthotics and Prosthetics at Wentworth Hospital (where the academic department is based).



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