

UCT GSB offers new specialisation option to boost management capacity in health care

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The University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business (UCT GSB) now allows students on its Postgraduate Diploma in Management Practice to specialise in health care leadership.

South Africa's health care sector is groaning under the combined weight of a high burden of disease coupled with a severe lack of skills in the sector.

According to Dr Shadrack Mazaza at the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business (UCT GSB), while the focus of the health care skills shortage is usually on medical staff - i.e. doctors and nurses - a lack of skills at leadership and management level is also contributing to the difficulties in the sector.

"Leadership and management skills in any sector are critical, but in health care, those at the top face a number of additional challenges," Mazaza said, himself a medical doctor who now works in leadership development at the UCT GSB.

"We know for instance that managers in health care in South Africa need to understand policy and regulation as well as how to operate with limited resources. We want to assist health care leaders and give them more skills for this complex environment," he said.

Speaking ahead of the launch of a new specialisation option as part of the UCT GSB's Postgraduate Diploma in Management Practice (PGDip), Mazaza said leadership in health care is critical, especially as the sector is still dealing with the past in terms of the burden on the system.

He added that there is much evidence to point to the fact that improved management could have a dramatic impact on strained health care systems. For example, a recent ground-breaking study led by the UCT GSB's Dr Linda Ronnie and medical doctor Bruce Longmore, showed that improved Human Resource Management (HRM) could help to address the grievances and concerns of health care workers by efficiently carrying out HR functions and delivering a seamless service designed to eliminate their workplace frustrations.

"It almost seems obvious and yet HRM has been largely overlooked in the sector as a means to address the health care crisis. But it is clear that the fundamental failings of the HR department have caused substantial frustration among doctors of all ages, providing a significant 'push factor' away from service in the state sector and having a direct impact on their willingness to remain in service at the medical complex. Only 32% of the surveyed doctors were willing to commit to continue working in this environment, 45% said they wanted to leave and 23% were undecided. The impact of poor HRM revealed the study can only perpetuate the staffing problems that plague the sector," Ronnie said.

Dr Elanca Shelley, director of the PGDip programme at the UCT GSB, said the new specialisation stream will offer people in the health care sector, who may be struggling with these issues, the opportunity to apply new thinking and cutting edge theory to their challenges.

"We want to customise the educational offering to enhance the transfer of learning and ensure that students are able to apply what they learn in their personal work context," she explained.

She said the UCT GSB is well-positioned to offer this kind of learning environment as it is the top business school on the African continent with a focus on emerging market economies and how companies and organisations can plan for success when operating in unstable and often insecure environments.

"The specialisation streams are in line with latest thinking in terms of developing African economies and the growing needs of businesses and organisations on the continent," Shelley said.

The PGDip programme was run for the first time in 2014. As of 2016, students will have the option to choose from one of five specialisations including leadership in health care, retail management, social innovation and entrepreneurship, wine business management and business acumen.

The PGDip differs from traditional management programmes in that it offers substantial integration between subjects, allowing for crucial insights into how sections like marketing, accounting and finance all come together in a company. The programme takes a systems-thinking and action-learning approach, a proven educational method developed successfully at the UCT GSB in other business education courses. Students implement knowledge in their workplaces between modules via action learning projects. This means companies and organisations see immediate benefits from employees participating in the course - while individuals are able to witness how theories work in practice - a valuable educational tool.

To find out more about the Postgraduate Diploma in Management Practice (PGDip) at UCT GSB contact 0860 UCT GSB (828 472) / admissions@gsb.uct.ac.za or visit www.gsb.uct.ac.za/PGDip.

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