

Bursaries and boreholes – helping in the healthcare space

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The partnership between Gift of the Givers and Bonitas Medical Fund has, and will continue, to have a positive impact in a quintet of interventions in the field of healthcare. The partnership, which began in 2018 continues into 2024, with an additional investment of R3.3m. This includes bursaries to final year medical students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the provision of boreholes at various health facilities across the country.



Bursaries from Bonitas: The final year medical students receiving their bursaries (from left to right): Luzuko Duko, Sarrkelo Masomi, Siyanda Ndlovu, Dr Ahmed Bham of Gift of the Givers, Lee Callakoppen: principal officer of Bonitas Medical Fund, Nhlakanipho Buthelezi, Nduriso Majola, Nkosinomusa Zulu and Lungelo Simelane. Tyrrell Pillay has also received a bursary but is not in the photograph.

Lee Callakoppen, principal officer of Bonitas says: "The association with Gift of the Givers goes back a few years, when we supported various projects on an ad hoc basis. The partnership is aimed at identifying health related projects being undertaken by the Gift of the Givers to which Bonitas can add value.

"In 2022, we aligned our CSI initiatives to our mantra: 'A Medical Aid for South Africa'. The purpose: To provide relief to the most vulnerable and marginalised communities, specifically in the field of healthcare interventions. We wanted to assist in the social upliftment of South Africans, particularly in the healthcare space. And who better to partner with than this leading philanthropic organisation in the country.

"Gift of the Givers continues to go beyond the call of duty to bring humanitarian aid where needed. It has built its reputation on the principles we, as a corporate citizen, also value: Respect, care, professionalism and dedication. We are proud to be partnering with them once again."

Bursaries for sixth-year medical students

Eight medical students in their sixth and final year of study at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, have received bursaries. The bursaries cover outstanding and current fees, enabling them to complete their final year of medicine and graduate as a doctor at the end of 2024. The students were selected based on their academic results and financial needs, and were vetted by the university as promising students in need. They are also diverse in terms of the background and locations, with a strong desire to enhance the healthcare landscape in South Africa.

Boreholes at healthcare facilities

Water is the gift of life and no more so than in a healthcare setting. It is essential to run a medical facility – whether it's a hospital or clinic or the communities around them. Critical shortages of water are hindering the provision of quality healthcare in a number of public healthcare facilities. Six hospitals and clinics have been identified by Gift of the Givers in partnership with Bonitas as being in urgent need of water interventions. They are located in the Eastern Cape, Gauteng, KZN and Free State and the healthcare facilities include a psychiatric hospital, general hospitals, clinics and an orphanage. The due date for completion on these projects is April 2024.

Dr Imtiaz Sooliman says: "All the projects we have partnered with Bonitas on have been a great success and we look forward to continuing working with them. In fact, soon after our staff became members of Bonitas in 2019, we knew there was synergy in our ethos, that a collaboration in the healthcare space with the fund would be a success.

"We are in the fortunate position of having the relationships in place to actively execute the necessary healthcare interventions, together with Bonitas. We are thrilled at the success of this continued partnership."

An overview of the most recent projects

Celebrating our nurses

In collaboration with Gift of the Givers, Bonitas honoured 470 nurses at the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Hospital in KZN in recognition of International Nurses Day. Nurses remain the backbone of the healthcare system and this gesture was to show appreciation for their exceptional service, especially in very trying times, such as the Covid-19 pandemic – when the entire healthcare environment was under enormous pressure.

After the floods in KZN

Bonitas responded to the disaster relief calls for assistance after the floods in KZN and donated R500k to Gift of the Givers to assist in rebuilding damaged healthcare facilities in the region.

The gift of hearing

This year Bonitas sponsored an audiology programme in KZN, which looked at testing the hearing of over 15,860 learners, at various schools during the year. "Children's learning is substantially compromised with hearing difficulties, reducing the possibility for progress and achievement," said Dr Imtiaz Sooliman. "Appropriate, early intervention is critical to make a meaningful impact on the academic development of the learner."

Disaster relief conference

Bonitas was a key sponsor in the disaster relief conference held in Cape Town earlier this year. The conference, the largest of its kind in the world, was attended by various stakeholders responsible for community upliftment and healthcare delivery.

Callakoppen says: "They say the best partnerships aren't dependent on a mere common goal but on a shared path of equality, desire and no small amount of passion. Both Gift of the Givers and Bonitas have the drive to help others. And, in terms of the fund, moving a step closer to providing quality healthcare for all South Africans."

Meet the Bonitas Medical Fund/Gift of the Givers/University of KZN bursary recipients:

Lungelo Nkanyiso Simelane (28)

Lungelo is from Pongola in the Kwashoba area and has two younger siblings. A doctor from his local village was his inspiration to study medicine, and he hopes to specialise in psychiatry or obstetrics/gynaecology.

"The bursary means a lot to me, it will enable me to complete my studies, and I won't be burdened with paying huge debts as I continue with my community service," says Lungelo. "My medical knowledge will help my community because I will be able to assist them whenever they are unwell and also in emergency situations. I hope to be an inspiration to the youth in my community to show that, even if you come from a disadvantaged background, you can rise above this and pursue your dreams. I have and will soon be graduating as a doctor."

Luzuko Duku (28)

Luzuko is from Lusikisiki in the Eastern Cape and matriculated from Rietvlei High School. He has two sisters and a brother. One sister has an honours degree in Social Sciences from UKZN, his other siblings have higher education certificates from different colleges. His father works as a security guard and his mother is a retired NHLS clerk.

Luzuko was raised by his late grandmother who suffering from hypertension and arthritis. "She used to take a lot of medication daily and she would ask me to help her with dosages as she was illiterate," he explains. "Through helping her and accompanying her to the clinic or when visiting a doctor, I developed a love for medicine and an interest to learn more about diseases and how they can be cured or treated. My childhood dream was to be either a professional footballer or a doctor, so when I realised I had the potential to qualify to study medicine, I made the decision to become a doctor." He hopes to go into the field of paediatrics.

He says the bursary means a lot considering the challenges he has faced. "It comes at the time where I have been gathering my mind regarding the discipline I need to succeed academically towards the end of my degree. However, now I don't have to stress about finances and that will help me mentally and academically. I am also looking forward to learning more about the Gift Of The Givers, I too want to give back and help others where I can. Maybe in future I might be part of the organisation."

Ndumiso Majola (30)

Ndumiso is from Nkandla, KZN – he graduated from Velangaye High School and was the first in his family to complete matric and to go to university. He has six siblings.

He says his primary school teacher Mr DP Ntombela told him more about the degree and studying involved to becoming a doctor. This, combined with his concern around HIV/Aids and wanting to be part of finding a cure for such conditions, set him on this medical path. "I particularly enjoy the holistic approach to healthcare and am keen to specialise in family medicine as it covers most disciplines and will allow me to reach disadvantaged people. I am from a poor economic background, so no one would have afforded to help me cover my fees. This bursary is giving me an opportunity to influence and have a good impact on people's lives. It's a career saving moment for me, and I would always be grateful."

Nhlakanipho Mcabango Buthelezi (27)

Nhlakanipho is from Ulundi. He finished high school at Impumelelo High School.

He says when he was in high school, he used to watch a TV show about medical detectives. "It was fascinating, and I was inspired to learn more about forensics pathology. I later learnt that you have to do medicine first then specialise in that field. I had the chance to visit a medical school when I was in Grade 12, that was the moment I realised I wanted to do medicine." He is still keen to specialise in forensic medicine one day.

"This bursary means a lot me, it has provided me financial relief, now I can focus on my studies, not worrying about financial support. With my medical knowledge I can be a healthcare advocate, assisting in promoting awareness about healthcare resources available in community. I could also empower or inspire the youth in my community that it is possible to do medicine, not matter the background you come from."

Samkelo Msomi (29)

Samkelo was born in Port Shepstone in the rural area of Kwa-Qwabe and after both parents died, the family struggled. When he graduates, he will be the first of 10 siblings to do so. Other members of the family were unable to finish studying because of financial constraints. Samkelo speaks Zulu, English and Xhosa fluently, and understands IsiNdebele isiNdebele, siSwati, and Sepedi.

He knew from 2007 that he wanted to do medicine and help people, even though he did not really understand what it meant. In 2010, when his mother was diagnosed with cancer, he realised what it means to help people medically, and his passion and determination increased. "Unfortunately, when I lost her, I felt like the reasons to do medicine were invalidated." However, he continued on his path and during his clinical years, it was the appreciation and thank yous from the patients, that reminded him again why he wanted to do medicine. He would love to specialise in obstetrics and gynaecology or mental health.

As the very first person from my community and surrounding schools who is doing medicine, he got huge recognition in his community, which motivated a lot of other learners to better their academics. Seeing Samkelo came from the same disadvantage community has helped them believe that could succeed.

He says, 'to become a successful doctor you need to have respect, discipline, patience and professionalism. You need to treat people not just as patients but the same way you would like your relatives to be treated. "My role model and the person who inspired me was my mother. She worked as a domestic worker and never failed all her children, she tried her best with the little she had to make a living for us and that inspired me to do better."

There is a quote by Anais Nin that keeps Samkelo motivated: 'Don't let one cloud obliterate the whole sky'.

Tyrell Pillay (24)

Tyrell is from Yellowwood Park in Durban. His father is a reverend and his mother is also in full time ministry. Has two brothers: One is a pastor and Nedbank supervisor and the other has a marketing degree and is a manager at BP.

"To be honest, I was really unsure about what I wanted to do after completing matric," says Tyrell. "It was my dad who gave me direction, spurred on by my grandmother who described her experiences at hospitals and telling me what type of doctor she would want to be treated by. I want to be that doctor.

I am grateful to Bonitas for this bursary, it means I can pursue my career freely, without financial limitation."

Tyrell is deeply religious and is involved in various community outreach programmes. His philosophy: 'Never quit! It ain't over until God says it's over.'

Siyanda Lethukuthula Ndlovu (29)

Siyanda is from Nqutu and attended Velangaye High School in Nkandla. He has two young siblings who are studying at different institutions. His mother is a teacher and the sole provider. Due to ill health (having suffered a stroke and kidney failure) his father is on dialysis three times a week and cannot work.

"My father, he used to be a paramedic which inspired me to look at a career in medicine," he says, "but I also have an innate desire to help others, to alleviate suffering, cure diseases and contribute to the well-being of others. It's a powerful motivator. Plus, when my father got ill and the positive interaction with healthcare professionals, during our challenging times, left a lasting impression on me."

He hopes to go into internal medicine, especially the sub-speciality which is nephrology. "Receiving this bursary is a profound honour and represents more than just financial assistance to me. It symbolises recognition and support for my aspirations in the medical profession and it serves as a catalyst for the realisation of my profession goals. In practical terms, this bursary alleviated the financial burden associated with this degree. The cost of tuition, books and other educational expenses can be substantial. This support allows me to focus more on my studies and clinical experiences without added stress of financial constraints.

"Ultimately, this bursary is an investment not only to me, but also the impact I hope to make in the medical field. It motivates me to work diligently, and in the future, to give back to the community.'

His personal philosophy is: *'Ofuna ukuba isikhonzi esikhulu makabe isikhonzi sabo bonke abantu'* meaning 'if you want to serve, serve everyone equally so'.

Nkosinomusa Zulu (27)

Nkosinomusa is from Nongoma in KZN and matriculated at Masibumbane High School. He has eight siblings, four are studying in tertiary institutions. He was inspired to do medicine from watching medical shows on TV. This created a strong interest and he even had the nickname in his household of 'Dr Carter' because of his obsession with a character on the show.

Of his clinical medicine years, he says: "Getting the chance to be hands on at the hospital and experiencing how the hospital staff work together as a team for the benefit of the patients consolidated my dream to be part of it. I also want to make a noticeable difference in the community. Every time I see a patient, my passion is reignited knowing I can make a difference.

"The bursary is really going to be helpful as the finances were becoming a great burden. The stress of being able to register in 2024 was really weighing me down and I keep wondering if I would be back and complete my studies. This will also give the family some peace of mind, knowing that I will be able to register next year and to continue with my studies. It has been a long journey, one where the destination is only at arm's reach.

"People knowing that you're a doctor is a good thing, as they take your advice or opinion on medical issues seriously. In conversations with people in the community – outside of the professional setting – you can advocate for health and also warn about risk factors of certain diseases. I also get to be an inspiration to young children who dream of choosing this path, to show them that it is possible and that it can be done. It was always my dream as a child to make a difference in my community."

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