

## **PRESS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Wits launches first Rural Health Career Day**

**4 March 2010**

The first Rural Health Career Day in North West Province will take place on Friday the 5<sup>th</sup> of March 2010 in Mafikeng. While shortages of health care professionals are a national problem, rural areas are disproportionately affected. North West is the province with the lowest doctor to patient ratio in the country. International evidence has shown that one strategy to increase human resources for health in rural areas is to recruit health science students of rural origin.

Therefore, the Wits Division of Rural Health in partnership with the North West Departments of Health and Education has taken the initiative to organize a Rural Health Career Day to create awareness and enthusiasm among rural learners in North West with regards to choosing a health science career. Integrated into the career day will be a health promotion component. The initiative forms part of the Division's social responsibility plan to empower students from the communities involved in terms of future career options and lifestyle choices.

The career day is offered to grade 12 learners based in the Ngaka Modiri Molema district. Final year medical students based in North West together with senior students from the other major departments in the faculty (pharmacy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, dentistry, clinical associates, physiology), will facilitate activities in the form of a series of mini-workshops on career options focusing on programmes offered by the faculty, as well as on teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, sexually transmitted infections and other topics that are relevant to young people.

About 300 grade 12 learners from 80 schools are expected to attend this first career day of its kind. If successful, the model will be rolled out to other districts in the largely rural North West province.

This follows the recent launch of another partnership initiative between the Wits Centre for Rural Health and the North West Department of Health: the grant-funded development of a District Education Campus at Lehurutse Hospital Complex in Zeerust, which is also in the Ngaka Modiri Molema District of North West Province. Choosing a health-oriented career is further facilitated by the North West Department of Health bursary scheme and WIRHE (Wits Initiative for Rural Health Education) Scholarship for rural students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Selecting students of rural origin and training them in rural areas are critical steps towards rural health improvements. North West is setting an example for other provinces to follow.

A partnership between:

Issued on behalf of:

Professor Ian Couper

Director: Wits Centre for Rural Health

For more information on the Career Day and WIRHE, contact:

Ntsiki Sondzaba

Lecturer Rural Health and Coordinator of the WIRHE Scholarship

Division of Rural Health, University of the Witwatersrand

Cell: 082 414 8766

Email: [Nontsikelelo.Sondzaba@wits.ac.za](mailto:Nontsikelelo.Sondzaba@wits.ac.za)

Web: Wits Centre for Rural Health: <http://web.wits.ac.za/Academic/Health/Entities/RuralHealth/>

For more information on the Rural Health generally, contact the Rural Health Advocacy Project:

Marije Versteeg

Project Manager

Rural Health Advocacy Project - A partnership between WITS Centre for Rural Health, RuDASA and  
Aids Law Project

Email: [Marije.versteeg@wits.ac.za](mailto:Marije.versteeg@wits.ac.za)

Cell: 074 -106 3800

Office: 011-356 41 00

Fax: 011-339 4311

Web: Wits Centre for Rural Health: <http://web.wits.ac.za/Academic/Health/Entities/RuralHealth/>

ALP: [www.alp.org.za](http://www.alp.org.za)

RUDASA: [www.rudasa.org.za](http://www.rudasa.org.za)

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