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Affiliated Institution Nelson Mandela University

Title Co-created Humanising Pedagogies in Higher Education: Dialogues on Indigenous Medicinal Plants

Sub-Theme Student Engagement, Agency, and Success

Format Panel Discussion

Abstract (200-250 words)

Calls for decolonised and humanising health professions education increasingly emphasize the importance of experiential and participative pedagogies that engage students as active co-creators of knowledge. Within South African healthcare contexts, students frequently encounter pluralistic understandings of health and healing, including indigenous healing systems and medicinal plant use. However, opportunities for meaningful engagement with these knowledge systems within formal curricula remain limited.

This panel discussion is based on an experiential medicinal plant learning activity, entitled Medicine, Culture and Religion, within a first year MBChB module originally implemented in the Missionvale Medicinal Garden. For this session, the activity will be adapted into an interactive panel discussion using potted medicinal plants, plant cuttings, multilingual plant labels, and feedback discussions. The primary purpose of the session is to facilitate co-creation and dialogue with a broader interdisciplinary audience comprising students and educators.

The session will begin with a 20-minute experiential component, engaging the audience with medicinal plants commonly used within South African communities, exploring themes of indigenous knowledge, multilingualism and cultural humility. The panel discussion will draw on insights from both the experiential activity and interdisciplinary dialogue to explore practical lessons emerging from implementing this activity within a formal curriculum, and how co-creation between students, educators, and community knowledge-holders can be theorised and sustained. Drawing on the work of Freire and bell hooks, and of Mbembe and Smith, the session will examine how to meaningfully integrate indigenous knowledge systems into health professions education, contributing to humanising and decolonised pedagogy that promotes student agency and interdisciplinary collaboration.