

Given the unavailability of a vaccine for the virus and its potential danger for older people and those with compromised health, it was vital and urgent to raise awareness about the virus and how to prevent its spread. Posters and flyers were immediately made available on the MUT campuses, in residences and on the buses that transport students to and from the University. The consistent message across social media platforms, WhatsApp and posters, was to wash hands every 20 minutes, practise social distancing, avoid hand shaking, and use elbows instead of hands when coughing. Sister Nomusa Mkhwanazi, Head of the MUT Clinic, attended a series of stakeholder engagement programmes organised by the Department of Health. “Her attendance helped provide accurate information about how we should communicate and immerse ourselves in the protocols of communicating this pandemic,” said Mbali Mkhize, Senior Director: Marketing and Communications.

Mkhize says that the MUT Brand Ambassadors quickly became Change Agents for the cause. They embarked on a week-long mission, moving from residence to residence distributing pamphlets on COVID-19 to students and the Umlazi community.

In addition to raising awareness via Sister Mkhwanazi and Dr Zodwa Ngobese’s presentations to the EMC, SRC, clinic staff, peer educators, peer helpers, house committees and student structures, the MUT Clinic played a key medical role. It used its facility to service staff and students and to screen patients with flu-like symptoms for the COVID-19 infection. It also provided immune boosters and flu vaccines to those in the HIV Wellness Programme as part of its medical interventions.

The Operations Directorate played a critical role in distributing hand sanitisers across the University. As part of its preventative measures, Operations also carried out the task of ensuring that all ventilation systems within the University were functioning optimally, and that the spaces into which the air-conditioning units extract are not used by staff and students.



Sister Nomusa Mkhwanazi

Following the declaration of COVID-19 as a national disaster by President Cyril Ramaphosa on Sunday, 15 March 2020, the MUT Senate met to discuss the implications of the President’s pronouncement. At this meeting Senate suspended all contact lectures, recommended that lectures be conducted online where possible, and limited access to the library.

On the basis of a 17 March directive by the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology, backed up by healthcare professionals, the MUT Senate proactively decided to move the University recess forward to 18 March 2020. The end date of the recess was moved from 15 to 17 April after the dates of the national lockdown were announced. South African students were given 72 hours to vacate University residences, while international students were provided with accommodation since they could not travel home. Graduation was also postponed. The University strengthened the use of Blackboard, which is an online tool to enhance teaching and learning. MUT staff continue to work from home, given the recent extension of the lockdown until the end of April.

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