



I am Mr. Dimakatso Given Mashala affiliated with the University of Limpopo, Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Optometry. I am a holder of the 'Bongani Mayosi' National Health Scholars Programme (BM-NHSP), 2021." I hold a Master of Public Health and a Bachelor of Optometry from the University of Limpopo (UL). I also hold a Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education and Advance Certificate in Ocular Diagnostics from the University of Kwazulu-Natal. My optometry special interest is in Ocular Disease Management, also, the epidemiology of non-communicable diseases. I am currently enrolled for a PhD in Public Health with special interest in health promotion and epidemiology and supervising Master students in public health at the University of Limpopo. I was introduced to public health while attending ocular

therapeutics course in 2016 where I was taught on how I can identify the disease distribution and how social factors are intertwined with public health. Also, research allowed me to play with numbers and make conclusions based on inferential statistics which I missed a lot from my love for mathematics.

I was introduced to SAMRC by my supervisor (Prof E Maimela). I aim to develop supporting intervention strategies that are aimed at caregivers, care burden and improving the quality of life of the forgetful stakeholders in the healthcare family by involving all the informal caregivers of visually impaired to manage the caregivers' burden. I would like to grow in this field to eventually become a renowned optometry public health scholar and advance eye health care in South Africa. Furthermore, my short-term goal is to continue advancing eye care community engagement through community-based participatory research. My ambition is to develop caregiver support groups for the forgetful caregivers in the eye care fraternity. There is currently a gap in this field especially in Africa and South Africa in particular. This is because optometry was previously concentrated in the private sector and not in the public health sector. This is evident in the poor attainment of the "right to sight vision 2020 campaign."

I am currently collecting data at the Mankweng Tertiary-Academic Hospital for my PhD project, where I interact with caregivers accompanying their relatives seeking eye health intervention at the institution. The data collection process is interesting because I get to interact with the caregivers and feel the spirit of Ubuntu and compassion that they have for their loved ones and understands the dynamics that come with caring for their loved ones. Interacting with the caregivers is totally a rewarding experience because most of these caregivers are from low social class and their spirit to care for their loved one is entrenched in Ubuntu; it is unmatched compassion amidst the burden they are experiencing.

The scholarship has contributed immensely towards my professional development where my public communication skills is expanded to include communicating the science to the public and how to do media interviews. I managed to publish a scientific paper in an accredited journal. I am in my second year of the PhD programme, once the project is complete, I would be able to take you through the journey I traveled. For now, I strengthened my patience and perseverance that are fueling the inner me to attain my goals. Invest, network, and maintain the network, you are the driver of your own success.