



From the desk of the Women's Wing

Empowering women – learning, conversation and inspiration

Dr Kgaugelo Manyoni, Women's Wing Committee

The month of August offered the Women's Wing an exciting and meaningful opportunity to reflect on issues that deeply resonate with our members. We wanted to use this time not only to celebrate women but also to empower them with inspiration and practical tools that they could apply in their everyday professional and personal journeys. Out of this vision came our August Thursday Webinar Series Takeover – a series of four engaging sessions that filled our Thursday evenings with learning, conversation and inspiration, all dedicated to honouring and uplifting women.

Taking the leap into private practice

Our first session focused on one of the most pressing considerations for many healthcare practitioners today: stepping into private practice. With the reality of rising unemployment in SA, private practice has become not just an option, but for many, a necessity and a pathway toward independence and financial stability. We deliberately set out to make this webinar practical, equipping members with actionable steps and real-world guidance.

We were privileged to host two dynamic speakers, Dr Sisanda Mabude and Dr Lethabo Machaba-Simelane. Both women brought unique perspectives, having navigated very different paths in private practice, yet they shared a common thread of honesty and practicality in their advice.

Dr Mabude painted a vivid picture of entrepreneurship, likening business to a marriage – except, as she humorously noted, “the honeymoon comes at the end.” This analogy reminded members that the early stages of business often demand resilience, patience and dedication. She highlighted the importance of choosing the right business partners and being clear about one's motivation for starting a business, stressing that the right foundation is essential for long-term sustainability.

Dr Machaba-Simelane took a structured approach, walking members through the concrete steps of establishing a business. She explained the different business and financial structures available, and how to decide which best suits one's vision and circumstances. Importantly,

she encouraged members to think outside the box when it comes to branding, positioning and diversifying their income streams. Her message was clear: private practice is not just about medicine: it's about building a resilient business with room for innovation and growth.

Together, the two speakers created a holistic conversation – balancing inspiration with practical knowledge – that set the tone for the rest of the series.

Navigating legal and labour realities

Our second session tackled an equally vital topic: the legal and labour issues that impact female practitioners. Too often, legal matters are sidelined until they present a challenge, but this webinar underscored the importance of being proactive and informed.

Our own legal expert, Laetitia Wolfswinkel, delivered a comprehensive and eye-opening presentation. She explored discrimination, sexual harassment, equal rights, maternity leave and family responsibility leave, while also acknowledging broader workplace realities such as safety concerns and the psychological stressors that many women face. Her explanations shed light on the often-overlooked nuances of workplace law. For example, she reminded members that sexual harassment is defined as any unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that infringes on an employee's dignity and equality in the workplace – a definition that can sometimes be misunderstood or minimised.

Building on this, our newly appointed vice chairperson and Women's Wing member, Dr Zanele Bikitsha, expanded the discussion to include additional areas of labour law relevant to women. She addressed adoption leave, surrogacy leave and paternity leave, underlining the need for policies that reflect the realities of modern families. Her presentation concluded with a strong validation of the need for inclusive workplace practices and equity-focused strategies that promote women into leadership roles. She reminded us that equity does not mean lowering standards but creating opportunities for women to thrive and lead on an equal footing.

This session was more than a legal lecture – it was a call to action. It empowered members to understand their rights, to advocate for themselves and to recognise the importance of pushing for systemic change in workplace policies.

Prioritising women's health and self-care

The third session shifted gears and explored a topic that is both professional and deeply personal: women's health. Dr Mama-Asu Koranteng-Peprah, an obstetrician and gynaecologist with a passion for preventive gynaecology, hormone health and perinatal mental health, delivered a powerful reminder of the importance of self-care.

As women, and particularly as doctors, mothers, daughters and caregivers, we often find ourselves pouring into others while neglecting our own needs. Dr Koranteng-Peprah challenged this tendency, offering practical tools to help women invest in their own health at every stage of life. She shared detailed guidance on essential blood tests for monitoring, as well as lifestyle adjustments that can protect long-term wellbeing.

One of the most memorable metaphors she used was that of the flamingo. She displayed the image of a vibrant pink flamingo and explained how these birds lose their colour after nurturing their young, but gradually regain their brilliance once they have restored themselves. This was a powerful reminder of our own cycles of giving and renewal – the reassurance that we, too, can regain our "colour" after seasons of nurturing others. The metaphor resonated deeply with members, leaving many inspired to prioritise their health not as a luxury, but as a necessity.

Mentorship and leadership in practice

We concluded the August Thursday Takeover with an inspiring session on mentorship, leadership and coaching, featuring three trailblazing women who are shaping healthcare and corporate spaces in profound ways.

Dr Lungi Nyathi, CEO of Aligned, spoke about fulfilment and personal development, urging members to pursue personal mastery. She highlighted the value of engaging with coaches and mentors who can provide outside perspectives, helping individuals refine their strengths and overcome blind spots.

Dr Nkuli Boikhutso then shared her journey to becoming CEO of Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital. Her story illustrated the power of persistence – of consistently showing up, exceeding expectations and positioning oneself as someone unforgettable in professional spaces. She emphasised the importance of making meaningful connections and networking strategically, showing how these practices can open doors to leadership opportunities.

Finally, Dr Judy Dlamini, chancellor of Wits University and an accomplished leader in multiple spheres, closed the series with a compelling message about education, confidence and resilience. She reminded us that confidence is not innate, but developed through continuous learning and practice. Education, she stressed, is a powerful tool for pivoting and advancing on one's journey. She also reinforced the importance of seeking support networks, mentors and allies who can walk alongside us as we strive toward our goals. Her words left the audience feeling both inspired and empowered, ready to step boldly into the future.

Closing reflections

The August Thursday Webinar Series Takeover was truly a labour of love from the Women's Wing team. Each session was carefully designed to balance inspiration with practical guidance, equipping our members to face the professional and personal challenges of today with confidence, resilience and vision.

We remain committed to creating spaces where women can learn, grow and thrive. If you have suggestions for future webinars, we warmly invite you to share them with us at members@samedical.org.

