

WITSIE AT THE CUTTING EDGE: Researcher Profile

Dr Hellen Myezwa

**Head of the Department
of Physiotherapy**



Who are you and what is your academic/scientific background?

I am a UK trained Physiotherapist. I hold an MSc degree from the University of Pretoria and a PhD from the University of the Witwatersrand. I gained extensive experience in public health and community based rehabilitation for 20 years before I joined the University of the Witwatersrand. My expertise includes rehabilitation, HIV disability and service delivery system competencies for rehabilitation and physiotherapy. My current interest in HIV developed from working at the community level and witnessing the evident burden of disease.

What is the nature of the research which you are currently undertaking?

My current focus is on expanding the knowledge base around HIV and disability in adults. The kind of disability experienced by HIV infected individuals and the interventions within the community that can and will impact on improving the function and quality of life for people living with HIV.

What do you think is the most significant contribution you have made to research/science?

I was part of the first teams that pioneered the World Health Organization (WHO) Community-based Rehabilitation (CBR) models in the late 1980s and helped to implement the concept of CBR over the last 20 years. I have also contributed actively to the profile of disability in HIV especially in the discussion of the national strategic plan for HIV in South Africa and in the Gauteng region. I currently work closely with HIV/AIDS, economic research and development on HIV and disability in UKZN (HEARD). I also continue to produce research that informs the management of HIV from a rehabilitation perspective. Through PhD student's supervision and teaching the subject at undergraduate level, I continue to be actively involved in CBR research.

Did you have a particular mentor or supervisor who inspired you in research?

I am grateful to my first supervisor, Dr Carina Eksteen who helped me to link research to all the practical work I was doing in the community and to Professor Aimee Stewart who challenged me to sharpen my research skills.

Tell us about what you do when you're not busy at work and carrying out cutting-edge research?

I take nature walks; spend time with my family and travel. I also do a lot of charity work related to my area of expertise and serve on a large international trust to help improve the health care delivery systems in the southern African region.

Read one of Hellen's papers: Myezwa H, Stewart A, Solomon P, Becker P (2012). Topics on HIV/AIDS for Inclusion into a Physical Therapy Curriculum: Consensus through a Modified Delphi Technique. *Journal of Physical Therapy Education*, Volume 26, No 2, pp. 50-62