

As you can see from the title of the newsletter, in this 8<sup>th</sup> year of follow-up, we are trying a slightly different format. We are adding personal reflections to the study findings,

cohort until 2024.

Dear Witsie,

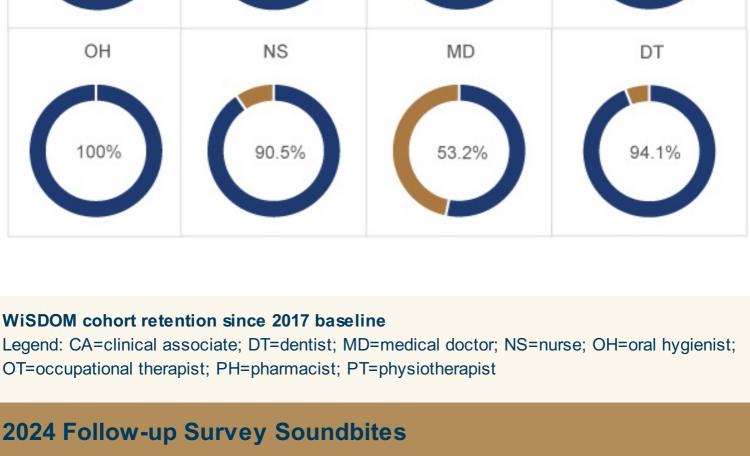
especially the two main outcomes of your long-term career choices and job locations. We are grateful to those of you who have agreed to share your journeys since graduation from Wits University in 2017. Unfortunately, some of you experienced personal tragedies and were unable to share your stories in this year's newsletter. We are humbled by your continued participation in the WiSDOM cohort study and will send the 2025 survey link to you during September 2025.

WiSDOM Cohort Retention since 2017

The graph below shows the proportion of study participants that we have retained in the

## We have maintained an overall response of 68.1% of the original cohort. This ranges from 53.2% for medics to 100% of oral hygienists.

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## majority of the other 7 health professional groups work in the private sector. The three top reasons for working in the private sector are: opportunities for

completed a specialist qualification.

reported a heavy workload, compared to 62.2% in 2023.

conditions (20.9%). 38.7% of medics, 5.6% of dentists, and 7.5% of pharmacists are in the process of specialisation, whereas 22.2% of nurses and 5.7% of pharmacists have already

professional advancement (26.8%); no public sector posts (22.9%) and good working

• 51.1% of the cohort are working in the public sector, but this ranges from 0% of oral

hygienists and dentists to 79.9% of medical doctors. Except for medical doctors, the

score. The lowest score for overall job satisfaction was for nurses (5.9/10) and the highest for dentists (8.1/10). • Your self-reported quality of life score remained at 6.7 (out of 10), the same as in

• The score for overall job satisfaction was 7.1 out of 10, which is similar to the 2023

Although there have been slight improvements in reported workload, 59.7% of you

10.3% located in 13 other countries. The majority of the WiSDOM cohort members who remain in South Africa are still in Gauteng (73.2%).

• The majority of the retained cohort are in South Africa (89.7%), with the remaining

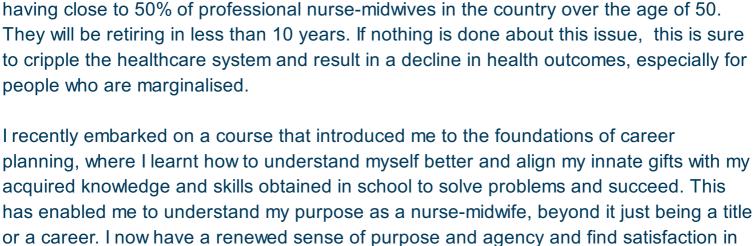
Lungile Gamede, Professional nurse and midwife The WiSDOM study is now in its 8th year

It truly is the embodiment of "living" research and an advocacy tool to inform

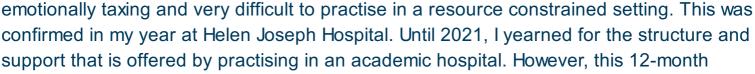
The inability to retain young professional nurses-midwives within the public health system beyond recruitment is for me one of the greatest challenges, amidst an imminent crisis of

Africa.

Health Coverage.



My first interaction with the WiSDOM study was in the final year of my undergraduate MBBCh studies in 2017, with a world of possibilities ahead of me. My focus was on successfully finishing my degree and being able to provide for myself. I thought two years of internship and rotations through various specialties would give me an idea



period confirmed something for me, that systemic problems leave no area or facility

The recurring question: what is my role in healthcare system? A niggling feeling from early in my career, that I can and should do more. So, I began furthering my studies. Postgraduate diplomas in Public Management and HIV Management were not enough.

After considering a Master's in Public Health and not finding a post, I ended up at the Gauteng

untouched.

When I graduated with a BSc in Physiotherapy from Wits, I stepped into a world with hope, excitement, and a heart wide open to learning. I didn't know then how deeply this profession would shape me — not just as a clinician, but as a leader, a teacher, and a person. My journey began in a busy public hospital, where I discovered my love for ICU patient care and the quiet joy of student mentorship. That year planted the seeds for a career grounded in service and continuous growth.

study are invaluable for improving the well-being, resilience and career sustainability of health workers in South Africa and beyond. It's meaningful to know that my story, alongside those of my peers, can make a difference. Zahra Waja, Chief Occupational Therapist, Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital, Gauteng

> My journey as a healthcare professional began in 2018, when I had the privilege of

completing my community service as a

experience laid the foundation for my

therapist at a leading academic hospital in the heart of Johannesburg. This formative

In 2019, I accepted a position at a specialised psychiatric hospital — a role that significantly challenged and expanded my professional capacity. As I progressed in my field, I found it increasingly difficult to navigate the emotional burden inherent in our profession. I came to realise that the very values that had drawn me into healthcare empathy, compassion, and care — were also the ones most tested under pressure.

Eventually, I returned to the institution where I had completed my community service, and

was honoured to step into a chief role, supported by the mentorship and guidance of

If I could offer advice to my younger self, it would be this: surround yourself with people

numerous systemic challenges — many of which are beyond our immediate control — we

who are passionate about healthcare, who pursue continuous growth, and who are

The WiSDOM Study has generated invaluable data that can help universities shape curricula to be more contextually relevant, better preparing young professionals to succeed in today's complex healthcare environment. Furthermore, the findings can

unwavering advocates for their patients. Although healthcare professionals face

continue to make meaningful, daily impacts in the lives of our patients.

those I had once trained under. This full-circle moment was both humbling and

empowering.

sector.

**Pandemic** 

support healthcare institutions and governing bodies in identifying ways to enhance both the personal and professional satisfaction of practitioners, particularly in rural settings, by

personal and workplace experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2020, 22.6% of you reported COVID-19 infections but this increased to 45.3% by 2021. The composite index shows that doctors and nurses reported the lowest COVID-19 workplace support, while oral hygienists and dentists reported the most support. The regression analysis showed that doctors (p<0.001) and women (p<0.05) reported significantly lower

workplace COVID-19 support scores. Those of you working in hospitals had 17.1% higher

COVID-19 infections (p<0.01). The lack of a COVID-19 supportive workplace resulted in

At the end of 2024, we published a paper on your reported vaccination status, and

**Publication on your Experiences during the COVID-19** 

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• 43.4% of the WiSDOM cohort are working in their profession in the public sector, while 39.9% work in their profession in the private sector.

## **Cohort Members' Journeys since Graduation**

2023.

and well on its way towards contributing to health policy development, and human

resources for health planning in South

transformation in the training and

placements of healthcare workers at such a pivotal time of transition towards Universal



of what to specialise in, because specialising was never in question. Internship in my hometown of Vosloorus was both a fulfilling and challenging experience. It was followed by a year at another regional hospital in Boksburg in 2020. Experiencing the limitations of state facilities is a test of fortitude at the best of times but the added impact of a pandemic (in this case COVID-19), triggers re-evaluation to an existential degree. Internal medicine offered me a chance to connect with patients and integrate the knowledge that I had spent years gathering; but it was exhausting,

South African National Blood Service, working in the specialised field of apheresis (a procedure that enables the separation or removal of specific blood components such as plasma, red blood cells, white blood cells, platelets, or stem cells). I am currently completing my Master's in Business Administration in Healthcare Leadership at Wits. I would tell my younger self to listen to that little voice more often and trust the process. I am admittedly still learning how to do this but it's a journey I'm more than willing to take. Cradwin Didloff, Chief Physiotherapist at a Public Sector Academic Hospital,

I later stepped into private practice, working with orthopaedic and geriatric patients. It was during this time that I realised how much more I wanted to know — how much more I could offer. It led me to the Neuro-musculo-skeletal Physiotherapy course run by the South African Society of Physiotherapy, a year that deepened both my clinical skill and confidence.

I returned to the public sector with fresh perspective and deeper purpose. Along the way,

measure. Eventually, I took on the role of Chief Physiotherapist at an academic hospital in

I began my Master's in Physiotherapy, focusing on Respirology, Cardiology, and

Johannesburg — a role that allowed me to lead with both skill and compassion.

Cardiothoracic Surgery — a decision that challenged and empowered me in equal

I stand in a place I once dreamed of — a space where I balance academic research,

Physiotherapy Department, I continue to pursue the part of my work that fuels me the

most: clinical education. If I could speak to my younger self 8 years ago, these words of wisdom would flow quite easily: "You don't need to know it all today. Be brave enough to

someone you'll be proud of". Physiotherapy has given me a career, but more than that,

Regarding the WiSDOM study, I find it important to continue being part of this cohort

and support systems for future generations. The insights gained from this long-term

understanding of the evolving journey of health professionals trained at Wits [university]. By participating, I am not only documenting my own professional growth and challenges but also helping to build a collective narrative that can inform medical education, policy

study because it offers a unique opportunity to reflect on and contribute to the

critical care, and student mentorship. As a part-time associate lecturer in the Wits

stay curious. Some days will stretch you — but every moment will shape you into

it's given me a calling. And I'm still just getting started.

career, as I began to appreciate the complexity and demands of working within the South African healthcare system. In the face of limited employment opportunities, my commitment to remaining in the public sector led me to relocate to another province.

addressing existing barriers. The WiSDOM cohort has provided a vital platform for South African healthcare workers to reflect on how the health system has influenced our careers and lives — from job satisfaction to decisions around emigration. It has also offered future healthcare workers rare insight into the lived experiences of serving in this dynamic and often challenging

15.7% higher infections among early career health professionals (p<0.01). The findings underscore the need for positive practice environments for early career health professionals in South Africa.

Should you wish to read the full paper, you can access it at here...