

Community Engagement

Newsletter

Faculty of Veterinary Science



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Farmers, cattle and students lining up to start vaccinating and processing.

Hands-On Learning: Vet Students and Industry Partners Boost Cattle Health in Mathibestad

On October 28th, a dedicated team of 14 veterinary and nursing students from various years traveled to Mathibestad for a critical community outreach effort: vaccinating and tagging local cattle.

This initiative was a powerful example of collaboration. Local farmer Mr. William Matjebe graciously provided a camp and built a sturdy, six-meter crush. When combined with the Red Meat Industry Services (RMIS) mobile crush, the team had a highly efficient 12-meter processing lane.

RMIS also supplied AllFlex ear tags and the expertise of two experienced staff members. MSD Animal Health generously donated essential vaccines (SupaVax and LumpyVax) and highly efficient automatic injectors.

The community showed up in force, ensuring a steady stream of animals throughout the morning. By midday, 201 cattle were successfully vaccinated, tagged, and aged, with all records uploaded to the RMIS database, ensuring better traceability.

Beyond the physical work, students engaged in crucial consulting. They performed Body Condition Scoring and distributed educational leaflets on the importance of seasonal supplements and nutrition. It was a hugely successful and gratifying morning.

Our sincere gratitude goes to RMIS and MSD Animal Health. Their generosity, combined with the tireless effort of our students, means that the Mathibestad farmers now have healthier, traceable animals—a huge benefit for the entire community.



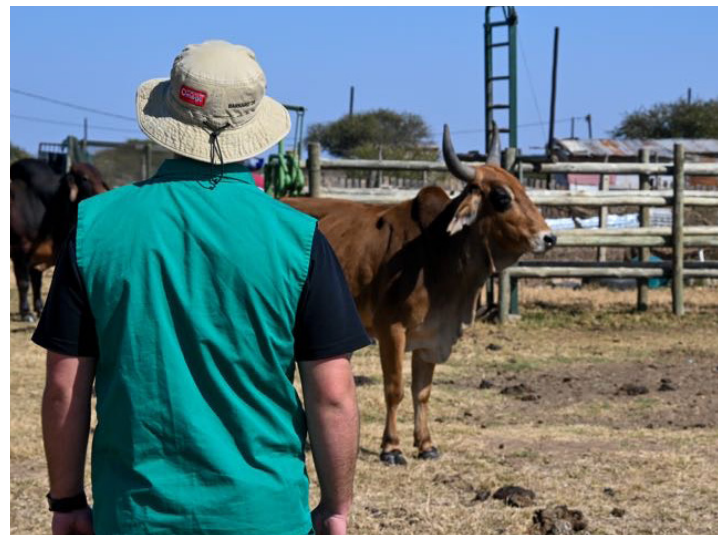
Post vaccination campaign: Dr Princess Moswa-Kato of MSD Animal Health reassuring students of the support that the company can provide to young veterinarians and emerging farmers.

Production Animal Mobile (PAM) Outreach Clinic

The Production Animal Mobile (PAM) Outreach Clinic is the Community Engagement part of the final clinical year Veterinary Core Practice (VCP) modules for veterinary and veterinary nursing students. Over the course of their eighteen-month clinical time, each student goes out once or twice to the communities of Ratjespane and Makopanstad and their surrounding villages with a fully equipped mobile clinic. PAM outreach works alongside and through the tribal authorities in these areas to implement animal health and welfare.

Farm visits entail addressing any sick animals and advice on management of herds using a complete health approach (nutrition, welfare, preventative medicine) all in the hope of increasing the value and productivity of the animals to benefit their human partners. Companion animal care focuses on primary care – vaccination, deworming, nutrition, welfare, the human animal bond and population control.

Over the past few months the students have experienced treating and advising on a range of animals from geese and kittens to mules and prize village breeding bulls. They have assisted with formulating information sheets on small and large livestock vaccination and supplemental feeding and information on sterilisation of pets and control of certain diseases such as rabies, distemper and transmissible venereal tumours. Students have learnt to interact with the communities and provide solutions with the means available to these communities on improving not only the lives of animals but of the citizens as well.



A student encouraging cattle to enter the crush



A student drawing up cattle vaccines at the mobile clinic

Amongst the citizens of the villages we have seen a shift in their outlook regarding their animals. The weekly requests for vaccinations and parasite control have increased as they learn the benefits of preventative medicine. Spin offs from PAM Outreach are the implementation of the sterilisation project for cats and dogs and vaccination days organised for livestock in the area.



Vaccinating dogs against rabies

PAM outreach is extremely rewarding, weekly the numbers of animals that are seen are growing as the community understands the importance of investing in the health of their animals. The clinicians and students find it an extremely rewarding learning experience. To quote a final year student – “Our job doesn't get much better than sitting under a tree with a village elder discussing the communal herds and chatting about life in general...”

RABIES MONTH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT at the Faculty of Veterinary Science

Dr Maxine Breytenbach (Community engagement lecturer: Faculty of Veterinary Science, Onderstepoort, University of Pretoria) (maxine.breytenbach@up.ac.za)

World Rabies Day is observed on September 28. The day is promoted by the Global Alliance for Rabies Control to raise awareness of the consequences and prevention of human and animal rabies. Annually this fatal disease causes up to 60,000 human deaths globally despite being preventable by vaccination.

Students and staff members at the Faculty of Veterinary Science at the University of Pretoria, attended various activities leading up to World Rabies Day.

A few of these activities are highlighted here.

21 August 2025 School visits

Ms Keshvi Nair (Keshvi@animalsindistress.org.za) and Ms Jasmine Claase (u18101217@tuks.co.za) (First year veterinary nursing students)

The first-year veterinary nursing students visited surrounding primary schools. They spent a couple of hours as teachers, sharing information about pet care and health and interacted with the children. This outing was the community engagement part of their LPN (Nursing Professional Life) module.



A veterinary nursing student explaining about different careers available in animal care to grade 7 learners

“Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” – a person is a person through other people. This proverb echoed throughout our LPN community engagement visits, reminding us that our humanity is deeply tied to how we care for one another, our communities, and the animals that live alongside us.

Our engagement focused on promoting animal welfare and rabies awareness through interactive and age-appropriate activities. Rabies was a natural choice: it is a preventable yet deadly disease that affects both humans and animals, making it an ideal example of how animal health and human health are interconnected. By teaching children about prevention, safe behaviour around animals, and responsible pet ownership, we were able to highlight this critical One Health link.

In preparing our lessons, we deliberately tapped into resources already available to us, such as the SAVA CVC materials, posters we designed ourselves, and animal welfare colouring books donated for younger learners. We avoided using sweets or gifts to elicit participation, recognising that learning about animal welfare should never come with conditions or expectations. Instead, we used humour, storytelling, games and visuals to encourage genuine engagement and participation.



Learners reading about pet care in booklets that the veterinary nursing students made for them

1-4 September 2025 — Rabies vaccination campaign

Dr Maxine Breytenbach, (Community engagement lecturer: Faculty of Veterinary Science, Onderstepoort, University of Pretoria) (maxine.breytenbach@up.ac.za)

The third-year veterinary students took part in a rabies vaccination campaign in collaboration with North-West State Veterinary services. Ms Conny Kaotsane from the state veterinary services, organised the venues and supplied vaccines, syringes and needles.

Their week started with an excellent lecture from Dr André Coetzer, Chief Executive Officer, from the Global Alliance for Rabies Control (GARC). He spoke about the epidemiology of rabies and that by vaccinating domestic dogs we can start to eliminate this deadly disease in humans.

The following day the first excited group of eager students headed to Mathibestad. Mr. William Matjebe made a piece of his land available for the campaign. The day had been well advertised in the community and was extremely well attended. The students vaccinated 253 dogs and 5 cats. The students and I also interacted with a local farmer and formulated a herd health plan to assist with his goat herd.

On 3 September the next group of students headed further north to Maubane. The Maubane Health Clinic had kindly made an area available for the campaign. The students vaccinated 204 dogs and 1 cat. The Production Animal Clinic mobile final



Third year veterinary students vaccinating dogs against rabies.

year students also attended the day with their fully equipped mobile clinic. The third year students were able to promote general health care and provide deworming and tick and flea treatments at reasonable prices to pet owners from the mobile clinic. Diagnosis and treatment of a dog suffering from chronic Ehrlichiosis was provided by the final year students.

The final group headed even further north on the 4 September to Opperman, Prieska and Thulwe. Here the villages are smaller and there was less awareness about the campaign. The students took matters into their own hands and went through the streets of the villages interacting with the community on the importance of rabies vaccination and recruiting owners to vaccinate. They managed to vaccinate 116 dogs and 1 cat in these villages.

A couple of final year students joined in again to assist the third years. They had a long discussion with a local farmer and learnt about local cattle leasing agreements and sharing of communal grazing practiced by the community.

Feedback from the students involved over the three days was excellent, they enjoyed the interaction with the community and loved the opportunity to raise awareness not only about rabies but general pet care and welfare. Apart from vaccinating, the students distributed rabies information leaflets provided by the Department of Tropical Diseases in Sepedi and English. Comic books and activity books for children were printed from the resources available on the GARC website. These booklets are directed at children, to raise rabies awareness and information on avoiding dog bites. The community received the students warmly and took pride in showing off their beloved pets.

Special thanks to nursing sisters from the Onderstepoort Veterinary Academic Hospital who volunteered their time to assist the students with the vaccine administration Sr Eugene Msibi, Sr Nicolien Fourie, Sr Madri Harding, Sr Lizette Neethling and Sr Katinka Jacobs. Also many thanks to Dr Liesel van der Merwe for joining in and assisting.



Setting up for the vaccination campaign with some curious onlookers

27 September 2025 — Pretoria North Rabies Vaccination Campaign

Ms Alexia de Abreu (Veterinary student, ivsasaop@gmail.com)

The International Veterinary Students' Association of South Africa held a rabies vaccination campaign in Pretoria North, visiting indigent settlements. This perfectly executed event was organised by veterinary students Ms. Alexia de Abreu and Ms. Channing du Plessis.

The International Veterinary Students' Association of South Africa successfully hosted its 2025 Rabies Vaccination Drive - a cause that lies at the heart of our mission and continues to inspire our annual campaigns.

Through the dedication of our student volunteers and the generosity of individuals and organizations who contributed their time, expertise, and resources, we were able to vaccinate 127 cats and dogs across five communities. In addition to rabies vaccinations, we also provided deworming and tick and flea treatments.

This initiative not only allowed our students to make a tangible impact on animal health but also fostered meaningful

engagement with community members, many of whom were eager to learn more about safeguarding their pets. The event highlighted the importance of education, collaboration, and trust in improving both animal welfare and public health.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Wollies Animal Shelter for their invaluable assistance in providing community connections, security, and essential support throughout the day. A special thank you also goes to Dr Breytenbach, whose guidance and expertise enriched the learning experience for our students.

This event would not have been possible without the generous backing of our sponsors: ProBono dog treats, Basix Clothing, and SAVA Community Veterinary Clinics. Their commitment helped ensure the success of the campaign and the wellbeing of the animals we serve.

Together, we have taken another important step toward creating healthier communities (both animal and human) and we look forward to building on this success in the years ahead.



Dogs and owners arriving for the rabies vaccination campaign

28 September 2025 — Heritage dog walk and information day

Dr Maxine Breytenbach (Community engagement lecturer: Faculty of Veterinary Science) (maxine.breytenbach@up.ac.za)

Two Vetsco committee members, Qhama Fikeni and Meynet Nortje, and I were invited by Sir Alex Mathebula to attend a dog walk and information day in Maubane. My daughter Caitlin joined us with our black labrador retriever, Pablo.

Sir Alex is a passionate dog lover and advocate for dog welfare. He runs the Sir Alex Dog Lover Foundation and promotes fundraising and education for the dogs and owners in the Hammanskraal area. The day was held together with DogNation a local welfare and dog lovers association. Mr Nice, owner of Nice Carwash hosted the event at his facility.

We started the day with fifty four dog owners and dogs participating in a 2.5km dog walk. Along the way we met people who came out to greet the dogs and we persuaded some nervous children to come out and pat the friendly canine participants.

On our return to the base we had collected a good number of excited children. The students and I distributed rabies awareness comic books (printed from the Global Alliance for Rabies Control (GARC) website) to the children and rabies information brochures to the participants. Mr Nice provided the participants and children with cold drinks and snacks and the dogs with cold water to drink. Sir Alex distributed dog treats to the canine participants.

Next on the agenda was a sit down session. An opening prayer was followed by a talk by Sir Alex on animal welfare and the success of his previous day's rabies vaccination campaign. I then gave a presentation, asking the community to take a "Guardian's Vow" for their animals and promise to provide them with the five pillars of freedom. I included information about rabies and gave advice on the current distemper outbreak in the area.

A question session followed where Qhama and Meynet contributed with excellent answers and advice to the community. Our day concluded. The



Dog walk through the streets of Maubane



Sir Alex and students at the Heritage Day dog walk

community remained behind to celebrate the birthdays of Mr Nice and Bruno the dog.

It was a truly uplifting day, we enjoyed it thoroughly. The highlight was the interaction with the children, many of whom had never interacted with dogs, by the end of the day they were petting and talking to Pablo, much to his delight.

The image shows a clinical setting with various medical supplies on a table. In the foreground, a patient clinical record form is partially filled out. The form includes sections for 'Patient Clinical Record', 'Clinical examination', 'Vital signs', 'Physical examination', and 'Medication and strength'. The 'Dog' section is filled out with 'Dog' and '30619'. The 'Vital signs' section includes 'Weight: 30.6 kg', 'Temperature: 39.1', 'Pulse rate: 132', 'Respiratory rate: 18', and 'Blood pressure: 120/80'. The 'Physical examination' section includes 'Mucous membranes: pink', 'Heart: normal', 'Lungs: clear', 'Abdomen: soft', 'Rectum: normal', and 'Feces: normal'. The 'Medication and strength' section includes 'Medication (mg/kg): 0.2 mg/kg SC', 'Number of ml: 1.25', and 'Dosed? No'. The 'Fecal blood coagulability' section is also filled out with 'No'. In the background, there are several syringes, vials, and a blue container.

Patient Clinical Record			
Clinical examination			
BGS (1-4, 5 = local BGS)			
2			
Vital signs		Physical examination	
Weight	30.6 kg	Temperature	39.1
Pulse rate	132	Respiratory rate	18
Blood pressure	120/80	Mucous membranes	pink
Physical examination		Heart	
Mucous membranes		normal	
Heart		clear	
Lungs		clear	
Abdomen		soft	
Rectum		normal	
Feces		normal	
Medication and strength			
Medication (mg/kg)	0.2 mg/kg SC	Number of ml	1.25
Dosed?	No	Fecal blood coagulability	
No		No	

Gratitude from pet owners was overwhelming. The confidence and skills of the students involved grew exponentially over the

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course of each day and feedback was positive with the students considering the days an extremely valuable learning experience.

This service has been provided to pet owners at no cost. The project is funded entirely by donations.

For more information, please e-mail maxine.breytenbach@up.ac.za



A veterinary nursing student checking on a patient recovering after his procedure

DO YOU HAVE A STORY ABOUT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT OP TO PUBLISH?

The Community Engagement Committee invites you to submit short articles to be published in the next newsletter

The article should not be longer than one page.

Contact person: Maxine Breytenbach (maxine.breytenbach@up.ac.za)



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