

Issued by the University of Pretoria and South African Breastmilk Reserve

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NEWS RELEASE

Celebrating World Breastmilk Donation Day: A Vital Initiative to Combat Infant Mortality



UP students visiting the SABR exhibition at the Faculty of Health Sciences

Pretoria — The South African Breastmilk Reserve (SABR), in partnership with the Department of Pharmacology at the University of Pretoria hosted a special event in anticipation of International Breastmilk Donation Day - globally recognised on May 19. This event highlighted the critical, life-saving role of breastmilk donation, particularly for the most vulnerable in society: premature and critically ill infants.

Breastmilk is recognised as a unique medical intervention that has significant health benefits, not only nourishing but also protecting infants against a myriad of health conditions. "Breastmilk is a vital source of nutrition and also serves as a first line of medicinal aid for newborns," says Stasa Jordan, Executive Director of SABR. Studies show that breastmilk has dynamic bioactive components that can significantly reduce infant mortality from conditions like Necrotizing Enterocolitis, a serious gastrointestinal problem predominantly seen in premature infants.

This year's theme emphasizes the pivotal role that breastfeeding and human milk banking serve in public health interventions aimed at reducing infant mortality rates. In South Africa, these efforts are critically important as the country battles high rates of maternal health issues including HIV, hypertension, and malnutrition, which profoundly impact infant survival and health.

The collaboration between SABR and the University of Pretoria has facilitated ground-breaking research into the pharmacokinetics of medications like Sulpiride when passed through breastmilk, crucial for understanding its impacts on infants. "By establishing a research-dedicated freezer at the University, we aim to expand our knowledge on how various medications can affect breastfed babies, ensuring that our interventions remain both safe and effective," says Professor Natalie Schellack, Head of the Department Pharmacology.

To mark this significant day, the School of Health Sciences will host an information stall from 9 AM to 12 PM in the courtyard, aimed at educating future healthcare professionals about the critical role of human milk banking.

The World Health Organization notes that nearly 1 million infant lives could be saved annually through optimal breastfeeding practices. This is particularly relevant under UN resolution 25, which highlights the importance of breastfeeding promotion in developing countries where breastfeeding becomes not just a nutritional but also a food security issue during crises. "Sensitizing student health care professionals to the lifesaving value of breastfeeding is the first step towards saving lives at the beginning of the life cycle" says Professor Natalie Schellack.

The SABR's efforts extend beyond just collection and distribution. Their So Safe breastmilk pasteurizer, a result of local innovation, ensures that donated breastmilk retains its quality while being safe for infant consumption. This technology is crucial in making human milk banking accessible and sustainable, especially in low-income settings.

As we observe International Breastmilk Donation Day, SABR and its partners reaffirm their commitment to improving the health outcomes of South Africa's newborns through research, technology, and the life-giving benefits of donated breastmilk.

For more information, to participate in milk donation, or to support our cause, please visit <https://www.sabr.org.za/>

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ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on its Hatfield Campus in Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also one of the largest producers of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). It is the only university in the country with a Faculty of Veterinary Science, which is ranked the best in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes. It has the most academic staff with PhDs (70%), NRF-rated researchers (613).

The 2024 Times Higher Education subject rankings placed UP first in South Africa in the fields of Law, Veterinary Science, Accounting and Finance; Agriculture and Forestry and Electrical and Electronic Engineering. Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked the University among the top five in Africa, as part of their 2024 World University Rankings (WUR). UP was the only South African university featured in the 2023 World University Rankings for Innovation (WURI), falling within in the 101-200 range of innovative universities.

For more information, please go to www.up.ac.za

ABOUT SOUTH AFRICAN BREASTMILK RESERVE (SABR)

The SABR is a not-for-profit organization that provides high-quality, pasteurized breastmilk to neonatal intensive care units across South Africa. Focusing on babies born prematurely or critically ill, SABR aims to provide these vulnerable infants with the best start in life through the support of breastmilk donors and healthcare partnerships.