In an effort to produce more health care professionals in the country to cater for the needs of all citizens, the University of Limpopo (UL) revived its Faculty of Health Sciences with additional schools. The Faculty now boasts two schools, namely, the School of Health Care Sciences and the newly formed School of Medicine which will start with an intake of 60 students in 2016. The faculty currently offers five health care programmes: Medical Science; Public Health and Health Promotion; Nursing; Dietetics; and Optometry.

The newly appointed Executive Dean of Faculty of Health Sciences, Prof Nonceba Mbambo-Kekana, realises the mammoth task ahead to ensure that the health professionals trained within the Faculty remain relevant to the health needs of the country and beyond Africa. She therefore envisions that the Faculty should be a leading Faculty focused on the health developmental needs of communities, particularly those in the immediate vicinity of the institution. According to her, this should be done through innovation and professionalising Health Education, and focus on primary health care, which should epitomise academic and service excellence. “The mission would therefore, be to promote provision of quality health care through educating health professionals with high professional standards, critical knowledge of rural health needs and relevant skills; providing service to the communities and undertaking research relevant to the health needs of communities, country and African continent.” The School of Health Care Sciences has made in-roads in this regard as the students already visit the clinics in the communities as well as hospitals for their training and provision of service.

Mbambo-Kekana declares that in a period of five years, the Faculty would have expanded with additional programmes such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and audiology as
well as radiography. “Starting up such programmes is not going to be a simple task; it will take a long period of time. Although the Faculty might not commence all of these programmes at the same time, we are certain that the expansion will happen,” she said.

She believes that the strength of the Faculty will also rely on research. “In order to improve research, interdisciplinary collaboration is the key. Since research experience is not the same within disciplines; expertise should be exploited to bolster those disciplines that are not strong in research. Moreover, health problems are managed and solved through interdisciplinary interventions and it therefore makes sense to structure research in that fashion,” she asserted.

Mbambo-Kekana, who has been in the higher education sector for over 20 years, obtained her junior degree, Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Physiotherapy in 1986 at the then Medical University of Southern Africa - MEDUNSA (now incorporated into Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University). She further obtained her Master’s degree in Physiotherapy Education from the University of Pretoria in 1996 and PhD from the University of the Witwatersrand in 2009.

Subsequent to qualifying as a Physiotherapist, she worked at Groote Schuur Hospital and was involved in supervision of 4th year physiotherapy students from the University of Cape Town in the clinical area. Later she moved to East London to work at Frere Hospital as a Clinical Physiotherapist. She then entered the academic sector, working for the University of Western Cape in 1989 as a Clinical Supervisor at Conradie Hospital working with spinal cord injured patients and also as a Lecturer for biomechanics and kinesiology. She has also worked at MEDUNSA in 1993 as a Physiotherapy Lecturer and within a year she was appointed Head of Department of Physiotherapy. This was to be the start of her academic management and leadership journey.

She was recruited by the University of the Witwatersrand in 2002 to serve as Head of Department of Physiotherapy. She then joined the University of Limpopo in 2010 as Director of School of Health Care Sciences, the position she held until her recent appointment as the Executive Dean.

Her expertise in physiotherapy has been utilised by Health professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) for accreditation of foreign physiotherapists and accreditation of physiotherapy training institutions. She has also served as an external assessor for universities of Western Cape, Pretoria, Witwatersrand, KwaZulu-Natal and the Free State.

She has successfully supervised 11 Master’s students and currently supervising 3 PhD students and 3 Master’s students.