

SAMRC Funded PhD Scholars Scoop both Natural Sciences Awards at the 2024 South African Women in Science Awards Ceremony

Two emerging researchers funded by the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC)'s Division of Research Capacity Development (RCD) have won awards under the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI)- Fellowships award category at the 2024 South African Women in Science Awards (SAWiSA): Dr Gabriella Hyman, funded under the SAMRC Institutional Clinician Researcher Programme and Ms Sinenhlanhla Mthembu, funded under the SAMRC Postgraduate Research Associate Programme. This year, the awards ceremony was held in Mbombela in Mpumalanga, on Thursday, 15 August 2024, under the theme "Transition towards an Innovation Economy: The Role of Women Leaders in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics".

The SAWiSA awards are aimed at showcasing women scientists and researchers who may serve as role models for younger women and encourage those who are starting their careers as researchers and scientists to continue in STEM-related careers. This year, the event honoured Esther Mahlangu by naming a category in her name: The DSI-Esther Mahlangu Fellowships for masters and doctoral candidates, in which our beneficiaries won both Natural Science awards. Dr Gabriella Hyman is a medical doctor from the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) and an MPH graduate from the T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Currently, she is a PhD candidate at Wits; her PhD research focuses on investigating the key performance indicators that affect the delivery and quality of surgical care in the South African public health sector. Dr Hyman hopes that her research will inform public health policy and practice and bring about innovative strategies for sustainable health systems strengthening. She has published 24 peer-reviewed publications in the renowned journals including The Lancet, Journal of Pediatric Surgery, and South African Journal of Surgery, and has presented her work at prominent international conferences.



Dr Gabriella Hyman receiving the DSI-Esther Mahlangu Fellowship Doctoral award at the SAWiSA

Miss Sinenhlanhla Mthembu did her first degree and her Masters which was funded by RCD at the University of Zululand. She is a Biochemistry PhD student at North-West University (NWU) in collaboration with SAMRC's Biomedical Research and Innovation Platform (BRIP). Her PhD research focuses on investigating the implications of Dyslipidemia, one of the major risk factors for cardiovascular diseases in patients with type 2 diabetes.

In addition, she is also investigating the potential therapeutic properties of dietary compounds such as Aspalathin and Sulforaphane on their cardioprotective properties. She has published her findings in 22 peer-reviewed articles. Beyond research, she has also taken on a mentoring role for post-graduate students at the Honors and Masters levels, furthering her commitment to advancing scientific knowledge and nurturing future researchers.

Upon hearing the news of her achievement, Ms Mthembu commented, "It is such an honour to be recognised as a finalist for the 2024 SAWiSA. Winning this award represents more than just personal achievement; it signifies more opportunities for my career as a young female scientist and open doors for collaboration. This has motivated me to continue conducting high-impact research that will benefit the nation at large. Lastly, I believe this achievement will serve as an inspiration to other young researchers, showing them that hard work does pay off, no matter where you come from."



Ms Sinenhlanhla Mthembu receiving the DSI-Esther Mahlangu Fellowship Doctoral award at the SAWiSA

The achievements of Dr Gabriella Hyman and Ms Sinenhlanhla Mthembu at the 2024 SAWiSA are not only a testament to their scientific excellence but also the impact of the SAMRC's research capacity development initiatives. RCD is committed to developing a vibrant and transformed health research academic pipeline in SA that is adequately equipped to train and inspire a new generation of clinical researchers. The [Clinician Researcher Development Programme](#) is aimed at attracting and preparing clinicians for research leadership positions. While the [SAMRC Postgraduate Research Associate Programme](#) supports the training and development of emerging scientists from historically under-represented groups.

Dr Abeda Dawood, Division Manager of RCD, expressed pride in the accomplishments of both scholars, stating, "The success of Dr Hyman and Ms Mthembu is a clear reflection of the RCD's commitment to nurturing exceptional talent and driving impactful research. Their achievements at SAWiSA not only bring prestige to the SAMRC but also inspire future generations of women scientists to lead the way in transforming our health systems and advancing scientific knowledge. This success speaks volumes about the quality of support provided by the RCD and SAMRC, reinforcing our mission to empower the next generation of researchers who will contribute towards developing innovative and sustainable healthcare products and services."