

- [Sara Padidar](#) ^[1]

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Victoria Mwanza, 42, is part of the first cohort of pharmacy assistants to graduate from the Southern Africa Nazarene University (SANU) with a Certificate in Pharmacy. This in-country pharmacy training program, established at the request of the Ministry of Health, was launched by SANU in August 2012, with the support of [US Agency for International Development](#) ^[2] (USAID)-funded and Management Sciences for Health (MSH)-led [Systems for Improved Access to Pharmaceuticals and Services](#) ^[3] (SIAPS).

Prior to starting her studies, Mwanza had been working in community pharmacies in Manzini for seven years. Manzini is the most populous city in Swaziland and retail pharmacies provide essential access to medicines and health care services to many patients, however, few pharmacies have trained personnel. As her pharmacy experience increased, Mwanza found herself eager to learn more about the profession. Remembers Mwanza:

I would see my pharmacist studying big, thick books all the time, and I often asked him about them. Then we heard about the new Swazi training programme for pharmacy assistants. I was very keen to improve my knowledge to better help my patients.

With support and encouragement from her pharmacist, Mwanza enrolled in the new Certificate in Pharmacy program. “The course was very challenging, especially the calculation modules! Also, being at University was especially tough, as I was the first class representative

for the first cohort of students for a new program. Everyone was learning!” says Mwanza.

The comprehensive, two-year full-time curriculum trains students on many aspects of pharmacy studies, including HIV management and counselling, research methodology, medicines supply chain management, and dispensing practices. Students are taught how to carry out health campaigns and provide adherence counseling for a range of diseases, including counseling to HIV/TB patients. Every semester, students take examinations. By the end of the program students are required to submit a portfolio as evidence of their competencies in a range of essential skills for pharmacy assistants. Says Mwanza with a smile:

The program has enabled me to better understand my scope of work, and the consequences of my actions and inactions with a patient, so now I am a much better pharmacy assistant. I am very proud of completing my training and gaining my certificate. I will continue to study because there is no stopping me now!

Mwanza and her 14 fellow students graduated with a Certificate in Pharmacy from SANU on the 24th of October, 2014. They are the first cohort to graduate from this new training program and will be valuable resources to the critical skills shortage of pharmacy personnel facing Swaziland.

Source URL: <http://www.msh.org/news-events/stories/first-students-graduate-from-siaps-supported-pre-service-pharmacy-training>

Links:

[1] <http://www.msh.org/users/sara-padidar>

[2] <http://www.usaid.gov>

[3] <http://www.msh.org/our-work/projects/systems-for-improved-access-to-pharmaceuticals-and-services-program>