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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: DR. MAHLATSE KGOKOLO – HEAD OF DERMATOLOGY AT THE STEVE BIKO ACADEMIC HOSPITAL – UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

SPEAKER	TRANSCRIPTION
DR. MALKA	Hello, I'm Dr. Amaleya Goneos-Malka, welcome to 'Womanity – Women in Unity'. The show that celebrates prominent and ordinary African Women's milestone achievements in their struggles for liberation, self-emancipation, human rights, democracy, racism, socio-economic class division and gender based violence.
DR. MALKA	Joining us in studio today is Dr. Mahlatse Kgokolo who is the Head of Dermatology at the Steve Biko Academic Hospital, University of Pretoria. Welcome to the show!
DR. KGOKOLO	Thank you Amaleya, thank you to your listeners.
DR.MALKA	It's wonderful to have you here in our theme at the moment where we're looking at women in the medical profession. In 2012 you were appointed as Head of Department for Dermatology, the University of Pretoria, Steve Biko Academic Hospital, can you please share with us some of the work that you do as well as the responsibilities that come with holding this role?
DR. KGOKOLO	There are four areas actually that you focus on as a head of department. Firstly you...we are linked to the University of Pretoria so it's a joint appointment and so we have to teach undergraduate students, medical students and post graduate students so we are training dermatologists to be specialists in other words.
DR. MALKA	So you're providing the practical element...
DR. KGOKOLO	...yes the training...
DR. MALKA	...the university gives the theoretical and
DR. KGOKOLO	...yes...
DR. MALKA	...you're responsible for showing the students exactly what to do.
DR. KGOKOLO	Yes. So that is the first area and then the second area is research, you must remember that the University of Pretoria it's a research intensive university, it's got that research focus and therefore we're training post graduate students to qualify to do dissertations for them to qualify for masters in dermatology. So they do masters in dermatology and after that which is research oriented and after that we do...they do... they write exams through the College of Medicine of South Africa. They do basically two exams; the one exam is in the form of research, it's a dissertation; the other exam it's written exams and clinical work, they do that, it's called Fellowship in Dermatology, they do that through the College of Medicine of South Africa.
DR. MALKA	And the research element is so important because it's really about pursuing new knowledge; it's about looking at innovations where the students are actually going out and developing that content....
DR. KGOKOLO	...yes...
DR. MALKA	...as opposed to just looking at the status quo of where things are but it's that pursuit of new development.
DR. KGOKOLO	...certainly, certainly, so since I joined the university I have produced five specialists. I joined the university in 2012, I've produced five dermatologist

	specialists and I've produced two masters, in other words research orientated dissertations qualifications, I've produced two of those but currently I've got four master students that have just finished their dissertations which have been submitted for marking so I could say I have four others upcoming...
DR. MALKA	...so nearly ten...
DR. KGOKOLO	...ja and ja but the other angle is that then we do clinical work, we see patients. Patients are referred from all over, from Mpumalanga, from areas in Johannesburg like Thembisa, from Witbank from some hospitals in Limpopo, you know, so we are a tertiary hospital so we see patient....difficult cases from all over because we are an academic hospital.
DR. MALKA	And I'm sure you must be presented with an incredible diversity.
DR. KGOKOLO	Of course, of course and we...once every quarter we meet as universities with vets and MEDUNSA and us and we have an inter-university meeting, we share all these interesting cases because seeing patients that are referred from all over actually exposes us to the most serious conditions or you could say interesting conditions in dermatology and at those meetings we share...each university shares three cases at each meeting and that makes it...that is very, very, very interesting.
DR. MALKA	And when I was reading up on your profile I was very interested to learn that one of your research areas is Xeroderma Pigmentosum, which if you in your terms can please explain to the listeners what that is because I was fascinated by that condition?
DR. KGOKOLO	Ja in simple terms this is a genetic disease, in other words one gets the genes from the parents, it's an Autosomal recessive condition and it is characterised by inordinate susceptibility to sunburn so the patients will, when they get exposed to the sun they react abnormally to the sun than one would normally react and therefore over time, at about the age...they are actually born with normal skin and at about the age of six months they start developing skin changes, this photosensitivity, sunburn and freckles, you know, the skin starts freckling and about a year to two years they start developing different types of tumours. Tumours are growths on the skin including angiomas and your skin cancers and actually my study is very interesting because I looked at the genomic and biomarker analysis of this condition Xeroderma Pigmentosum in South Africa and this is a first, it has never been done so I'm doing my PhD on this condition to add scientific knowledge to how we can understand the disease better in our country.
DR. MALKA	And particularly when you think of our climate and the extent of the sun that we have because these people are almost...in laymen's terms allergic to the sun.
DR. KGOKOLO	Of course and it's interesting because I'm also part of the Xeroderma Pigmentosum support group and so they have camps once a year and we as clinicians attend the camps to teach the parents and since we got involved four years ago actually the conditions of our patients have improved because we have educated the parents about the condition, what it entails to protect the children from sunburn and that has improved their quality of life a lot, yes.
DR. MALKA	And that's one aspect I think which is to a certain extent unique within the academic space and also medical space where you've got these fantastic global connections and networks where we have extensive collaboration on particular diseases or issues where we're trying to investigate and pursue, so besides the Xeroderma Pigmentation focus have you got any other projects that are running that go across and collaborate with different countries in the world?
DR. KGOKOLO	Well in particular for this research on Xeroderma Pigmentosum, because we do not have facilities to do genetic tests in our country so I've had to

	<p>collect the specimen, I've had to for permission from the Department of Health to ship specimen to France and then I went to France last year to do the tests, so I have a collaboration at the University of Bordeaux which is in the south of France and one of my co-supervisors is there, Dr. Cecile Gert, so I did...I went there for a month and we did the tests together and...but besides that I am a part...I'm actually a founder member of the Skin Cancer Foundation in South Africa. We have screening clinics, we run screening clinics once a year so the 1st September of every year is screening....screening day, Skin Cancer Foundation Screening Day.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And on those screening clinics are they mobile units that go around the country, or is it just a day where people can go into medical institutions, facilities and request skin screening or learn to understand what signs they should be looking for?</p>
DR. KGOKOLO	<p>Ja there are specific sites that are identified to do the screening so we are one of the sites because we are part of Skin Cancer Foundation but there are specific consulting rooms and sites; other sites that have been identified specifically for the purpose and this is also advertised, yes.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Well thank you very much for elaborating more on some of the work that you do and also giving the public more knowledge about some of the research components and the importance of doing those reviews on skin for skin cancer detection. Now our programme is all about gender equality and as such during the course of our conversation we'll highlight some important issues on this topic and I'd like to start by asking your perspectives...I'd like to start by asking you about your perspectives concerning women empowerment and gender equality legislation, particularly in relation to being able to close some of those gender gaps so whether that relates to pay, promotion or position?</p>
DR. KGOKOLO	<p>Well I think we're still lagging behind and I have checked statistically the percentages of women in senior management positions varies between 25 and 29% about internationally and I think we could do better and in my mind we have to keep going as women. I think we should not stop, we should not look back but we have to keep moving forward, in whichever way, yes.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And in part of that I've been starting to think increasingly that it's not just a one sided view of women pushing and trying to drive their agenda but we also need to have partnerships with our male counterparts in being able to walk this journey together, that it's not about women taking away from men, but it's about contributing and changing perhaps our worldview, our views of culture, our views of society in terms of how we frame the correct journey, as you said, for moving forwards.</p>
DR. KGOKOLO	<p>Ja I agree with that. I think we cannot do it without the men, remember currently the world favours men so most of these positions, we are talking about 25% to 29% of women occupying senior management positions so the rest of the positions are obviously occupied by men and therefore it means we have to team up with them to be able to rope in other women so that we can move forward as women, so we need them to access the platforms to take in other women.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And during your career from when you first enrolled in academics and have now traversed into your working life, how do you see the progression of gender?</p>
DR. KGOKOLO	<p>I think it's getting better. It's getting better every day, it's getting better every year and I believe that if each one of us as women can do our best every day and have the right mind to empower other women I see us going forward and improving the numbers even more.</p>

DR. MALKA	And if I can ask you what gender challenges did you encounter during your career and how did you overcome them?
DR. KGOKOLO	Firstly I'm a rural girl so obviously when a door opens I become so excited and therefore I'm saying to rural and township women out there you can actually rise, the sky is the limit because we could rise, I could rise from where I was and so when I was admitted at medical school obviously I was over excited and when I was admitted to become a registrar to specialise in dermatology I was also so excited and when I was interviewed and selected for the post of heading dermatology I was also excited. Of course it comes with challenges and the challenge was that when I became a head of department I had no mentor. I had...I was in the jungle, I had to find my way but you know what but when you find...you have to find your way that's when you get it right because then you'll surround yourself with a team that will help you move forward and you ask those people who have been around. So when you run you want to run a marathon, obviously you go and speak to the athletes who ran the marathon and then you learn as you move forward.
DR. MALKA	And I really liked what you said there about surrounding yourself with the best team because ultimately you can't do things by yourself and in leadership it's optimising people who are specialised in their different areas so whether it is in strategy or whether it is in the administration component and bringing the best out in order to deliver on the job. One area you know as we're in women's month now, is that we tend to hear the same conversations about the importance of advancing women in the workplace, but yet these strategies feel increasingly stale and as you just said those numbers internationally are just not shifting, kind of going between 25 to 29%, that dial is not going ahead and when you look at it in another way it means that men have 70 to 75% of those positions. I think that women's day is obviously a very, very important day to celebrate and women's month in particular because I believe it creates more awareness of the causes that women need to have...the causes that are confronting women and the type of achievements that they have made to date, but it's also an opportunity to address challenges and those hidden obstacles to help reach gender parity; in your opinion what more do you think can be done to break the cycle and give women more than just promises of opportunities for an equal workspace?
DR. KGOKOLO	I think we should actually use the platforms that we have, the different platforms to consciously enhance other women. For instance I orientate the first years at the University of Pretoria for Faculty of Health Sciences and this is where I see young, fresh women, you know, and when I talk to them I talk to them consciously encouraging them, showing them how qualified I am and consciously telling them how much they can also rise, you know, so I think someone else gets involved in a project of take a girl child to school, I think if I do my part and in training post graduate students, making sure that I train women consciously as well, you know, so if I do my part and you do your part and somebody else on their platform does their part, it will add up and this will help us take women forward.
DR. MALKA	Absolutely then we're being able to contribute to that development and give back. You mentioned that you were from a rural background, from Limpopo and I find another contentious issue is that gender equality sometimes touches sensitive points like culture, religion and tradition; do you think that it will ever be possible to overcome these points for the sake of women's development?
DR. KGOKOLO	Well I think as humanity we should be focusing on common ground. What is it that we have that is common as human beings, it is the humanity so if we can focus on what...on what is common to all of us then we will be able to move forward because you know culture, religion and all those things

	could divide us but if we could focus on the fact that we are all human beings and the fact that we are all women, then I think it will be easy to find common ground and we will be able to move forward.
DR. MALKA	I think that's a really enlightening point of having that commonality as a foundation.
DR. MALKA	Today we're talking to Dr. Mahlatse Kgokolo who is the Head of Dermatology at the Steve Biko Academic Hospital associated with the University of Pretoria.
	AD BREAK
DR. MALKA	You are listening to "Womanity – Women in Unity" on Channel Africa, the African Perspective, on frequency 9625 KHz on the 31 meter band, also available on DSTV, Channel 802. Today we're talking to Dr. Mahlatse Kgokolo who is the Head of Dermatology at the Steve Biko Academic Hospital associated with the University of Pretoria. We would love to receive your comments on Twitter: @WomanityTalk.
DR. MALKA	In the previous segment of our conversation Dr. Kgokolo spoke about some of the components that are attached to her duties and responsibilities in her role; we also spoke about some of the research components, we delved into issues of gender equality and looking at some of the aspects which will help forge us from a point of commonality, identifying at the level of humanity as opposed to looking at differences and we also considered the view of everybody who has their own platforms to utilise those platforms in order to give back and help women to achieve.
DR. MALKA	Dr. Kgokolo continuing with our theme of gender equality, from a practical perspective one of the most common problems affecting women in South Africa seems to be not as a case of so much legislation or programmes that have been structured to assist women but rather on a broader context of being able to educate our citizens about issues like gender equality in the workplace, in the home front, women's rights; based on your experience how do you think women can achieve progress regarding those types of issues that affect them?
DR. KGOKOLO	I think that all those women that are in senior positions should be mentoring other women. I think it's the only way we can break into informing and educating the younger ones about their rights, the workplace and getting better, getting it right, doing it right you know, so I think it's a journey, it's not a one day thing but again if I do it from where I am seated you know sometimes I have to take off my HOD hat and sit with my students and have a woman to woman talk. I do that so I think we should all do that, we should have a platform where we talk women talk, young women and again if I do that, you do that, somebody else does it, it adds up. It makes women a better group you know.
DR. MALKA	And I wonder if as well as the informal setups and the giveback that we don't almost have some formal structures where people can go to because the reality is you can't have an open door policy continuously because you've got a job to be doing, you're HOD or whatever someone else is doing but to have some kind of formal setup established where women can participate, where they know if this scenario happens this is what I should do, if I want to get to this point this is the way of doing it, these are the challenges that I'm going to experience and this is how I can overcome them so maybe there's a formal programme that we need to consider establishing?
DR. KGOKOLO	Ja that's also a good idea.
DR. MALKA	And one of the I suppose difficult components that gender equality principles talk about is this challenge of being able to balance the home life with the work front and pursuing career development, which in some environments people have got partnership where each partner is responsible for certain elements

	and...or they do a blend and they work things out, but I know in many other situations often if a woman wants her career she still has to contend with looking after the household as being the primary caregiver; as a successful a woman who's worked hard for say almost three decades to build your career and family base, what's your perspective of this and do you have a magic winning formula which can offer women practical hope to manage it all?
DR. KGOKOLO	I think there's no one magic formula but it's all about doing your best every day. Setting short-term and long-term goals and focusing on them and remember you have to do it for yourself, it has to suite you. For instance I worked in private practice when I was raising my kids and...because then I could cancel my appointments and go and attend poetry at school or swimming or whatever and that suited me at the time, but as soon as my kids finished high school and went to varsity it was only then that I thought of spicing up my career and that was when I moved to University, the reason being I thought I could share my knowledge, I could train other specialists, which is why I am where I am today but somebody else could decide to do it differently. So I am saying women should not be pressured, each one of us should work things out to suite me and not somebody else. Yes.
DR. MALKA	We all walk our own journey.
DR. KGOKOLO	Yes, this was my journey.
DR. MALKA	That's really important because I think sometimes people want to emulate other people and say how did you get there, what did you do to achieve that and there isn't one prescribed route because the reality is we lead different lives, we are exposed to different elements and those all combine to make our life journey.
DR. KGOKOLO	Yes.
DR. MALKA	Now turning more towards a personal perspective can you tell us about some of the pivotal moments in your life growing up?
DR. KGOKOLO	Well I had my mother as my role model. You know when I was in...my mother is a very clever woman and I must say that women as women we always make a plan. You know my mother when I was in form four at the time, that is grade eleven, she took me to the Department of Health, I was still young then and she took me to the Department of Health and we met with the then Secretary of Health, a Dr. Matshube Bahlele and my mother simply said to him my daughter is very intelligent, she wants to become a doctor and I need a bursary for her and I'm talking about an ordinary nurse, you know, she was just a nurse, an assistant nurse but she had the wisdom to say what am I going to do for my daughter. Now that made my life you know and when I think about that it actually helps me to overcome any challenge that she could do this because when I look back I was the first one to go to varsity at home and I am thinking that if it wasn't for that I would not have gone to varsity, you know, so as a woman I do my best every day. I give this life my best every day because I believe that my mother gave life her best every day.
DR.MALKA	And fantastically in terms of the way that she set you on the path.
DR. KGOKOLO	Exactly.
DR. MALKA	She set you up, she looked at the bursaries and she said this is what my daughter is going to do...
DR. KGOKOLO	...yes...

DR. MALKA	...and that gave you the focus
DR. KGOKOLO	...yes...
DR. MALKA	...I remember earlier you were talking about short-term and long-term goals; she put you on that path.
DR. KGOKOLO	Thank you.
DR. MALKA	And what would you say influenced you when you were growing up and had the biggest impact to make you the person that you are today?
DR. KGOKOLO	Well besides having had such a positive mother, my grandmother also who was blind, I stayed with her when I was really young, young, young, you know and my grandmother recognised me by footsteps because she was blind and she would praise me, tell me how best...how I am the best, how I am beautiful, how...you know it's so they say in psychology the first six years of your life actually built you and that was when I lived with my grandmother, she saw a perfect little girl and yet she was blind and I think that built me. When I go through a challenge I always know that it will get better, it always gets better and I tell this to the young women that I mentor all the time that remember, when you have a challenge that a challenge is followed by the success, by the opportunity and so it always gets better.
DR. MALKA	So in your life you've had two really strong female role models, both from a nurturing point of view and also on a practical perspective of setting you up for your career path.
DR. KGOKOLO	Of course.
DR. MALKA	Now lastly as we close the show today can you please share with us a few words of inspiration which you'd like to pass onto young women and girls who are listening to us on the continent today?
DR. KGOKOLO	I will say this especially to the rural girl, the township girl that the sky is the limit. You can rise to whatever destiny that you want, it doesn't matter where you come from, rise and focus on your goals, do not focus on the challenges. It always gets better.
DR. MALKA	I think that is fantastic advice and it seems as though that is the advice that you have lived by and proven that it works.
DR. KGOKOLO	Thank you.
DR. MALKA	Thank you so much for joining us we really appreciate the time that you've taken to share your story and your successes.
DR. KGOKOLO	Thank you so much for your time and thank you to the listeners.
PROGRAMME END	