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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: PROFESSOR PRISILLA S MAKUNYANE – HEAD OF DEPARTMENT OF OPHTHALMOLOGY – FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES – UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA AND STEVE BIKO ACADEMIC HOSPITAL

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 on the line today from Pretoria in South Africa is Professor Prisilla Seipati Makunyane, who heads up the Department of Ophthalmology in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Pretoria and Steve Biko Academic Hospital. Professor Makunyane joins us for our series on Women in Medicine; welcome to the show!
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	Thank you very much Dr Amaleya.
DR. MALKA	Prof Makunyane, as head of ophthalmology, please can you tell us a little bit more about the work that you do as well as some of the responsibilities that come with holding this position?
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	Yes, as the head of department my responsibilities include overseeing all ophthalmology units in the Steve Biko Academic Hospital and University of Pretoria cluster, that means overseeing ophthalmology units in the following hospitals, perhaps I do not need to give you the names but there are about six, so these are the hospitals that form the cluster under Steve Biko; Steve Biko is an academic tertiary institution. Now my responsibilities are really academic and clinical and to some extent even managerial, now this would include service delivery, research output, teaching and training of both under and postgraduates, outreach and I also work alongside managers in HR, in the department that orders equipment, pharmacy and many others in hiring and staffing and coaching and training and monitoring performance, planning, especially activities such as glaucoma screening during the world glaucoma week and some activities in eye care during the eye care awareness week, which is held in October, so these are some of my responsibilities. So I basically would make sure that we deliver a comprehensive medical and surgical care to our patients and then I also oversee and develop patient management guidelines in our department and obviously I report to our CEO and then I have to also update my medical knowledge and ensure the optimal research output from our department and also making sure that I foster relationships with other medical disciplines.
DR. MALKA	That is quite an extensive portfolio with a number of different functions spread across a mix from the academic space as well as towards the clinical aspect as well as the management and the fact that you are also not just looking within one institution and one hospital, but going across to six hospitals. Given the spectrum of your work, what would you say is your greatest challenge in this position?
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	Yes, staff shortages, coupled with existing posts being frozen, you know, shrinking or tight budgets at all levels and I mean obviously this would have serious repercussions on the quality of services one needs to render and maintaining excellence becomes a great challenge, but as a manager

	in this position one needs to learn ways and means of accomplishing more with very limited resources, yes.
DR. MALKA	And with academic hospitals, like Steve Biko for example, my understanding is that a lot of the patients that you see are non-paying patients.
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	Yes, this being a public institution, yes many of our patients would be retired, the poor that use the services, yes.
DR. MALKA	So it is servicing not just from a point of view of let's say developing talent and nurturing young people into their professions as doctors, but it is also about what happens in the public sphere and providing a valuable public service.
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	Absolutely, yes and you also need to be training specialists in that arena.
DR. MALKA	You've mentioned some of the constraints that you experience, in looking forwards and ahead what types of milestones or targets do you want to achieve?
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	The milestones, you know, I aim at training twenty Ophthalmologists in my tenure, I have so far trained about twelve in the past seven years. The other thing is I have just completed my postgraduate diploma in public health, it was an online course that I decided to do, a two-year course that I started in 2020, at the beginning of lockdown and the pandemic and then also I feel I owe myself a PhD, I feel I need to do it. The other thing is it is not just really milestones that relate to me, I have one of my consultants doing a PhD and I am really happy that it is happening under my watch and another one who has just successfully completed a fellowship in the orbital diseases and ocular plastics, it is one of the sub-specialities in ophthalmology, so that is what I am working on and what I have done so far.
DR. MALKA	Well those are great targets to have in place but also wonderful that you have already made a success and an inroad into achieving some of those goals.
	AD BREAK
DR. MALKA	We're talking to Professor Prisilla Seipati Makunyane who is Head of the Department of Ophthalmology at the University of Pretoria and Steve Biko Academic Hospital. We would love to receive your comments on Twitter: @WomaniTalk.
DR. MALKA	Prof Makunyane, you mentioned some of your research outputs as being one of the let's say KPIs within the position that you hold; we work in a connected society that stretches across different geographic borders, can you tell us about some of the research that you are doing or collaborations that you are working with other counterparts in different countries on the continent?
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	I have an interest in colour vision, generally, that is an area of my special interests and one collaboration I have worked on and successfully so is with the CT University in the United Kingdom, which has been instrumental in designing a novel method of quantifying colour vision deficiency, they work more in the occupational environment and I am also a member of the International Colour Group. So, so far I have really just written a few papers on the importance of colour in the workplaces that really need one to have good colour vision and also I don't think I mentioned to you that I also am a chairperson of the Aeromedical Committee of the South African Civil Aviation Authorities, so this is a committee appointed by the director of SACA, that is South African Civil Aviation Authorities in collaboration with the University of Pretoria. So we are tasked with the responsibility of advising the director of the Civil Aviation of complex medical cases presented in our monthly meeting to just ensure appropriate issuing and renewing of medical certificates for

	<p>pilots, cabin crew and other aviators, so in other words we ensure that the privileges of their licences apply and are not likely to jeopardise safety, so that also is an area of interest for me and so I am involved in putting together protocols and guidelines in ophthalmology as far as that is concerned and the papers I have written relate to that, but not only that, I have actually looked at colour vision in patients, TB patients on some drugs that can affect the eye and colour vision deficiency being one of the presenting signs thereof. So, you know, in our setting not all TB patients will be brought to us, once they start these drugs for us to check their visual function, but colour vision can be picked up as one of the first signs in the toxicity of these drugs.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>So colour vision is or the deterioration of colour vision is a side-effect from the toxicity of the drugs, it is not an indicator of TB?</p>
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	<p>Not so, so there are these drugs that are used as my first line in TB treatment, they actually cause what we call toxic optic neuropathy, that is the diseased optic nerve, but one of the first signs of that is the colour vision deficiency.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Vision is so important, I mean it is one of our core senses ...</p>
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	<p>... yes ...</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>... I saw some research published or rather let's say statistics published from the World Health Organisation, which indicates that globally there are at least 2.2 billion people, so that is approximately a third to a quarter of the global population, who have near or distance vision impairments. In at least 1 billion of those cases vision impairment could have been prevented or has yet to be addressed and obviously vision impairment poses an enormous global financial burden and they estimate annual global costs of productivity losses associated with vision impairment from uncorrected myopia and presbyopia alone, is in the region of 244 billion US dollars and 25.4 billion dollars respectively. Less developed countries are clearly impacted more than higher income regions; please can you share some insight into some of the conditions that you treat which are typical to our region?</p>
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	<p>Yes so just before we get to that, you have mentioned problems such as myopia and presbyopia, these are reflective errors that would require mainly optometrists to pick up early in life in order to relieve this vision impairment in the sufferers, but in our setting, in Steve Biko Academic Hospital for instance, being a referral hospital, the types of conditions we come across would be complicated, cataracts, glaucoma, thyroid eye disease, retinal detachments, all forms of eye cancers especially one called retinalblastoma that is a tumour that is a cancer of the retina that affects two-year-olds. Very sad, really, really sad to see. So there is another one called keratoconus that leads to poor vision, deteriorating vision especially in the young people who would have suffered for a while with keratoconjunctivitis, it is an allergic conjunctivitis that leads children to rub their eyes chronically and that weakens their cornea and they start losing vision, so many of them end up needing cornea transplants, so those are kind of the types of conditions we see at tertiary level, but otherwise simple cataracts, allergies, conditions of the lens, those patients would be treated in our cluster hospital, our district hospitals, then those that cannot be managed at district level, they are then referred to Steve Biko Academic Hospital.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>You mentioned some fairly complicated conditions which has possibly out of a referral process that maybe people have got to you later than perhaps they should have and you also spoke about I think it was the retinalblastoma</p>

	affecting two-year-olds; are there any types of eye-related conditions that women are potentially more predisposed to than men?
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	You know on average we would say because women live longer than men, so we see a lot of age related conditions of the eye in many women; cataracts, age related macular degeneration and there is also we call it a Dry Eye Disease (DED), it is much more common in women because it is hormonally influenced and women are also more prone to developing autoimmune diseases such as SLE, that is Systemic Lupus Erythematosus, rheumatoid arthritis and many others, so these tend to affect women also as well.
DR. MALKA	You know literally a week or so ago we had a conversation with Dr. Kavita Makan from Wits and Chris Hani Baragwaneth Hospital and she is a rheumatologist and she spoke about some of these autoimmune conditions and the extreme hormonal link which is why women are more affected by these conditions.
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	Absolutely, absolutely and pregnancy too, you will remember with pregnancy we can get preeclampsia, that is very high blood pressure leading to damage of the optic nerve and so there is that too that we see.
DR. MALKA	What should women be on the lookout for, you know, to make an awareness of that they are experiencing something which is out of the ordinary that they should go and get checked-up on?
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	Well really that would be any form of pain in the eye, poor vision, any change in one's vision, it may be just blurring or a sudden loss of vision, acute pain, an itch or a feeling of pressure in the eye, you know halos around the lights, so all these would be just signs or symptoms that should alert them to stand up and do something about their condition.
DR. MALKA	Thanks for sharing some of the elements that you treat from an Ophthalmologist point of view and also sharing some of the insights towards diseases that women may potentially be more predisposed to.
	AD BREAK
DR. MALKA	We're talking to Professor Prisilla Seipati Makunyane, who is Head of the Department of Ophthalmology at the University of Pretoria and Steve Biko Academic Hospital. We would love to receive your comments on Twitter: @WomanityTalk.
DR. MALKA	Prof Makunyane you are so involved in your field through multiple facets and different committees and different initiatives; what made you decide to specialise in ophthalmology?
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	Well my story starts when I was still in general practice, I had this lovely patient whom I had been treating and together with her family who was just experiencing deterioration in her vision and ultimately lost her vision. You know as a general practitioner then, I realised that we were not really exposed to ophthalmology during our training and I needed to refer her to an ophthalmology centre in Chris Hani Baragwaneth Hospital and I still didn't really understand what was happening, so that was just the beginning of my curiosity and need to know more as far as eyes were concerned and it was just around the time that I was looking around to get a speciality, you know, to specialise in one of the fields of medicine, so that is how I got to apply to do ophthalmology.
DR. MALKA	In your experience, you have obviously run through your training as an individual and becoming a specialist, but now you are back in the academic space and training young professionals in the discipline; from your point of view do you think enough is being done to make the field of medicine and indeed specialisations like ophthalmology attractive disciplines for women to pursue?

PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	I must say now I really believe that a lot of work is being done in our country to encourage women to specialise, especially in our university I really take pride in how they encourage us women to take positions of power and leadership in many sectors and of course in medicine. So yes I do believe, compared to the time that I was training, there has been a vast improvement in that area.
DR. MALKA	And what would you say the ratio of men to women is from an ophthalmologist perspective?
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	Hmm, okay, I think you know just looking at my own department right now I would say it is 50/50, however in general, I mean we still have many more men in the field, there are much more than women, yes, so we still have a long way to go for women to be more qualified in this speciality.
DR. MALKA	One of the learnings that we've had from our conversations with various female doctors is that from a career point of view you enter this space at the same time as men but obviously men are not going off to have children, they are continuing with their career path, but often women end up delaying having children or getting married because they're trying to finish with their studies, which is ongoing. How do you think we can better manage systems like that to ensure that women don't exit the system and still receive the right types of benefits to pursue their career to the highest level possible?
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	Yes that is one challenge that women, even I had the same problem during my training that, you know, as a registrar that is still training I was raising my two children who were three and five and it really was difficult and I see it with my registrars who would fall pregnant and that means taking off for four months, but what I do and what many of our departments in South Africa do is extend their registrar time or their training time. So after having taking the four months off for maternity leave, we add four months to their training time, but that at least I think it helps them not to want to put off some of their responsibilities, but to be able to fulfil both worlds, if you like.
DR. MALKA	Whilst we're talking about training and education, can you expand for us please on how attaining your academic qualifications has impacted your life and the reason that I ask this question is that sometimes younger people may be at a crossroads in their life where they're deciding should they study, should they get a job, how important would an academic degree be in their future?
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	You know I look at what I have been able to achieve being the second black woman to qualify as an Ophthalmologist in South Africa and the first black woman to become an professor in Ophthalmology in South Africa, for me I really feel I am fulfilling my purpose and destiny as a role model for young women and I believe I am fulfilling the needs of a servant leader also and so I believe and I know for a fact that I have encouraged a number of women who never thought they would ever step into Ophthalmology and today they are specialists themselves and some are even pursuing fellowships in various sub-specialities. So really being a role model out there and that really satisfies me.
DR. MALKA	Those are wonderful achievements, so congratulations for literally paving the way for the rest of women to walk in your shoes and walk on your shoulders.
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	Thank you very much.
DR. MALKA	Thinking about facets of success, one of the questions that I ask all my guests on the show who have made tremendous achievements in their respective disciplines and the question really is about what do you think have been some of the factors that have helped contribute to your success. Some people speak

	about discipline, faith, hard work, a particular person or even, I will never forget, when we had Rebecca Malope on the show, she spoke about the fear of failure; so if you could please share with us, in your view, what have been some of the key drivers for your success?
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	My faith, my faith in God, then I also believe that my life, my gifts, talents are really not about me and I need to be adding value to others and that is what drives me, you know, to your point I also had a terrible fear of failure, but I have learned to really be gentle with myself and really take care of myself, you know, to take care of me in order to take care of others. You cannot take care of others if you are not really gentle and caring to yourself. So my faith and the fact that my life is not about me, so I need to be adding value to others.
DR. MALKA	You really echo sentiments of servant leadership in all of the things that you have said throughout our conversation today. So we've spoken about some of the factors that have contributed towards your success, can you tell us about a few pivotal moments that have shaped your life growing up which have got you to the point that you are at today?
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	Yes, you know, as a child I had really good parents, my father was a doctor, I just remember once, you know, at the age of eight, he took me alone to watch a post-mortem ...
DR. MALKA	... wow! How did you feel?
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	I guess I probably was insisting on going with him then, because my father was a doctor, my mom was a nurse and they were all working in their practice which was at home, so I believe that has shaped me in many ways and my first anatomy book I think was bought for me by my parents at age eleven, so yes, so I guess I got that from my parents really, my mom and my dad in that way.
DR. MALKA	So you entered the family business.
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	Yes, in a way, yes.
DR. MALKA	But you know what, I think that that almost positive brainwashing is so important that you were being shaped without really being conscious of it and look where you are today.
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	Absolutely, absolutely, yes, it is so important.
DR. MALKA	Given that our show is about celebrating women and reflecting on our achievements, can you tell us about some of the women who have been key influences or role models in your life?
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	Okay, quite a number but my mother, she had these attributes of softness and a very quiet person and very gentle, but had inner strength, so I probably have acquired that from her in many ways I believe and I am grateful for it because in a way I feel that even though I am in this male dominated environment, I do not feel the need to become aggressive or change who I am, I am a woman, I do have a gentle disposition, but I am strong, I embrace my strength and I remain who I am, I am comfortable in my own skin in that way. My spiritual mentor is a lady called Reverend Jackie, so she is actually a priest, this lady really brought into sharp focus for me issues affecting women globally and the importance of hard work as a woman and embracing my womanhood, my inner strength and she contributed immensely to my spiritual growth and the value of selflessness and so I have learned a lot from her. Amazing, one other third one, you know, I look at my daughter, it is amazing, my daughter has multiple sclerosis, has epilepsy, has psoriasis, she struggles with obesity, but I look at how she overcomes all this and how she just rises up

	and as we speak, will be graduating next month with a masters in fine arts, all alone in America, she is in America and you know I often just think of her and think my goodness, nothing is impossible and as a mother, there was a time when I thought she wasn't going to make it, but there she is, in remission and really going up the ladder with her films being nominated in Canada for some awards, that I still need to understand, I don't fully understand but she is really just against all odds, pursuing her passion, yes, so those are the three I can think of, but obviously, you know, we learn from one another as women, even the downtrodden, the poor, you learn from every woman that you come across, you see yourself in them and there is always something to learn from one another.
DR. MALKA	That is such an important statement, the way that we see ourselves in other people, but also the value of the contributions that every person makes to our lives, whether consciously or sub-consciously, there is always some exchange that is imparted.
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	Absolutely, yes.
DR. MALKA	Prof Makunyane, we are at the end of the show now and as we close out the conversation, please can you use this platform to share a few words of inspiration or motivation to young women who are listening to us on the continent today?
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	Yes well I would like to just leave just a message for every women is to know thyself, understand who you are, understand your strengths and your weaknesses, work on your weaknesses, live your truth. No-one is going to set you free as a woman, we need to tap into our inner strength and set ourselves free and we need to be gentle with ourselves, support one another and always show empathy to one another. I guess if you understand yourself and you fully understand yourself you will be able to understand someone else's struggles and whatever they are going through and have empathy and to find your purpose as a woman. Once you find your purpose then you will understand the reason why you are on this planet. So that is what I would like to leave with all the women out there.
DR. MALKA	Thank you for that wonderful message that has so many elements to it, the one that really resonates with me is the aspect of care; care for oneself and care for others. It has been a pleasure to host you on the show, thank you for joining us.
PROFESSOR MAKUNYANE	Thank you very much Dr. Amaleya, thank you, enjoy yourself.
DR. MALKA	Thank you.
	PROGRAMME END