

Everybody say, Aah wanna be a doctor

DOCTOR

Dr Siphon Nhlapo, 41, general practitioner, Protea Glen, Soweto

Why do you do this job?

I chose to become a doctor because I love helping people get better. It's also a very interesting job.

What training did you have?

I studied at Medunsa for six years. I was very lucky because I got a bursary to study. If I didn't get that bursary I would not be a doctor today. I started my studies late because when I was in matric in 1985 there were uprisings and all the schools were closed. I had to wait five months before I could write my exams. I only wrote my final matric exams in May 1986.

What happens, nine to five?

I wake up at 7am every morning and go to gym where I train for one and a half hours. I do this every morning, because this is the only time I have for myself. I start work at about 10am and I see about 40 patients a day. I often don't finish until about 7pm. Sometimes I don't even have a chance to eat.

My job is interesting. I listen to people's problems when they come in, and then see how I can help them. Some people come in with stupid problems and others with serious ones. The very complicated problems I send to a specialist. Basically what I do is I diagnose what is wrong with the patient, and then I prescribe and dispense the right medication for him or her. I can also perform minor surgical procedures like circumcisions, draining abscesses and stitching wounds.

What is the upside to your job?

Because I have my own practice, I don't have to report to anyone. I always say my patients are my bosses. If I am late or if I am not there, they are the ones who are

unhappy. I at least get to make my own rules.

What is the downside?

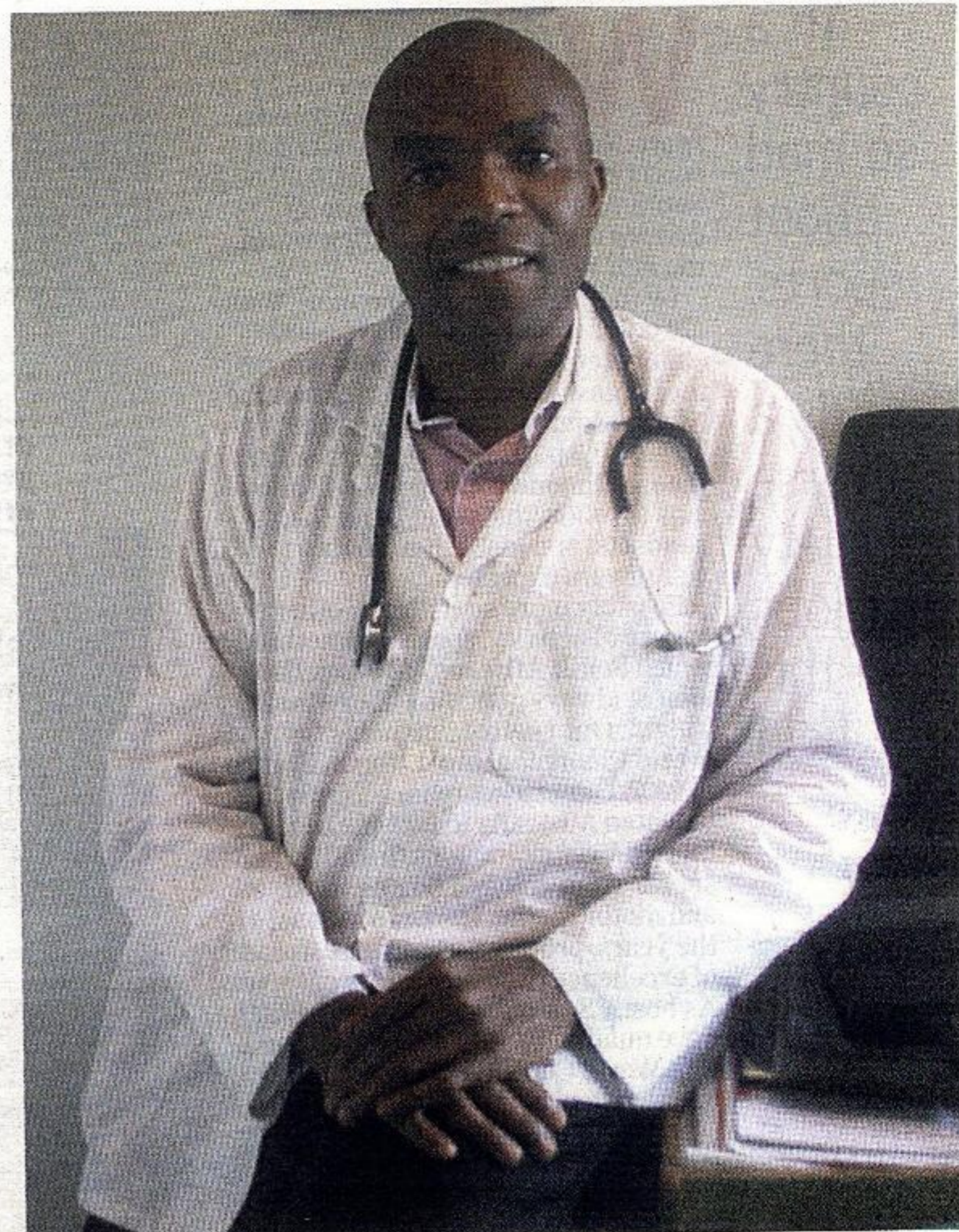
My profession is over-regulated. There are so many people benefiting from the people getting ill that it is difficult to make a good living. You have to work like a slave to break even. My consultation fee hasn't been in line with inflation — I still only charge R211 a consultation. You have to fight medical aids to get paid and you make no profit dispensing medication; sometimes you dispense at a loss.

Who are your role models or mentors?

The late Dr Nthato Motlana.

What will you do next?

I never thought I'd stay a GP for long but, it takes five years to specialise and that would mean that I would need to close my practice and go and work for the state — when you're not even going to get paid. This is difficult to do because I have commitments and responsibilities. It's really discouraging to want to study further but to know that you can't.



INTERESTING JOB: GP Dr Siphon Nhlapo, who has his own practice
Pictures: PUXLEY MAKGATHO

'I don't have to report to anyone — my patients are my bosses'



NIL PER MOUTH: Ali Long is called in to meet a sick child's nutritional needs

Nourishing care for kids

DIETICIAN

Ali Long, 37, dietician with a special interest in paediatrics, in private practice at the Donald Gordon Medical Centre, Johannesburg

Why do you do this job?

I have always been interested in food, cooking and health. Being a dietician is a great way to combine all my interests. I am a clinical dietician who focuses on children with underlying medical disorders.

What training did you get?

There's a big difference between a dietician and a nutritionist. A nutritionist can do a week-long course, but a dietician has to be

medically trained and state registered. You can either study a BSc degree with a two-year postgraduate degree in dietetics or you can do a three-year degree in dietetics followed by a one-year postgraduate diploma. I did the second option at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I then studied in London to specialise in paediatrics.

What happens, nine to five?

I often start my day attending ward rounds at the Donald Gordon Medical Centre or at the Park Lane Hospital, where I look after premature babies. Sometimes I am asked to go to a different hospital, which I do if I can, but it takes a long time to get there and back. I calculate the nutrition that the

children and babies require for their age and weight and then work out if they are getting enough calories. If they aren't, we feed the child artificial nutrition either through an intravenous drip or using a nasogastric tube. Sometimes I give a diet plan, or for children with allergies a list of what they aren't allowed to eat. But most of my work is giving nutritional support. I also teach other healthcare professionals like doctors, nurses and other dietitians about child nutrition.

What's the upside of your job?

I get to help, teach and work with children.

What's the downside?

You don't make a lot of money. In fact sometimes I don't bill for my work. It's an ethical dilemma. Many of the children I see come from impoverished areas where they only have a hospital plan or they have run out of medical aid funds. You also have to get used to coping with the fact that you are working with very sick children.

Do you have any role models?

There are some paediatric dietitians in London who I am still in contact with, and they regularly e-mail me with support and advice if I need it. There aren't a lot of paediatric dietitians in South Africa, so I have had to seek out my own mentors.

What will you do next?

I am very happy doing what I am doing. What I wouldn't mind, though, is to get some work with a big corporate company like Discovery for a few hours a day to help supplement my income.

'You have to get used to coping with the fact that you are working with very sick children'

Careers in the sector	Personality traits for each career	Where to study and the requirements needed for the tertiary institutions	What grants or bursaries are available in the sector
Doctor	Compassion; ability to remain calm in a crisis; problem solver; meticulous attention to detail; integrity	Study a MBChB (Bachelor of Medicine & Bachelor of Surgery) at UCT, require matric exemption with high maths and science marks	The Discovery Trust; Gauteng Department of Health; and SA Medical Association all offer bursaries
Nurse	Compassion; ability to remain calm in a crisis; ability to make people feel comfortable; high EQ; integrity	Bachelor of Nursing at Wits University, require a matric exemption. Can also apply to public hospitals, most run a nurses training programme	KwaZulu-Natal provincial administration; David Hepburn Study Award; Discovery Trust
Dietician	Interested in good health; good people skills; patient; persistent leadership skills	BSc degree in Dietetics at the University of the North, require a matric exemption with good maths and science marks	The University of Limpopo has a bursary scheme;
Occupational therapist	Patient; able to put people at ease; good communication skills; good attention for detail	Bachelor of Science in Occupational Therapy at UCT, require a matric exemption with high maths and science marks	The Department of Social Development; Discovery Trust; Gauteng Department of Health
Speech and hearing specialist	Patient and considerate, but objective; clear communication skills; ability to put people at ease; enjoy helping other people	Bachelor of Science in Speech-Language Pathology at UCT, require a matric exemption with high maths and science marks	Mtrtle L Aron Bursay, KwaZulu-Natal provincial administration
Radiologist	Physically strong; good people and communication skills; calm, gentle and pleasant personality; emotionally mature and stable	Masters in Medicine (M.Med) Diagnostic Radiology at the University of Limpopo, require a relevant Bachelor degree	KwaZulu-Natal provincial administration;
Dentist	Enjoy working with people; good people skills; ethical; patient good eyesight; able to handle high stress levels	Bachelor of Dental Science at Wits University, require a matric exemption with good maths and science marks	Gauteng Department of Health
Physiotherapist	Enjoy helping other people; physically healthy and strong; good body co-ordination; high ethical standards	Bachelor of Science in Physiotherapy at UCT, require a matric exemption with high maths and science marks	UCT has bursary and financial aid programmes
Medical receptionist	Pleasant telephone manner; well presented; friendly; helpful	Cert in Secretarial Studies at Rosebank College, require a matric	Rosebank College has a bursary programme
Medical writer	Creative; methodical work style; ability to work independently	BJourn degree from Rhodes University.	Rhodes University has bursary and financial aid programmes