

Top scientists roped in to defend Rhodes Covid-19 vaccination policy

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Rhodes University has pulled in some of the country's leading scientists to dispel "misconceived, unscientific" and just plain "wrong" claims put forward by a small group of university students and staff that have mounted a legal claim to its Covid-19 vaccine mandate policy.

The group, Makhanda Against Mandates (MAM), claimed in court papers that the university's decision to impose a vaccine mandate on anyone wanting to access its campus was over the top, not supported by the "latest science" and infringed on their individual constitutional rights to equality, human dignity, freedom and security of the person and fair labour practice.

They believe these constitutional rights override the university's decision that to best

protect its students, staff and the Makhanda community from the virus required a mandatory vaccine policy.

Internationally renowned clinical epidemiologist Prof Salim Abdool Karim and Rhodes University's formidable microbiology Professor Rosemary Dorrington — who specialises in molecular virology — have submitted affidavits citing peer-reviewed research that appears to systematically annihilate most of the claims made by the group, both about the Covid-19 virus and the vaccine.

Both scientists say they unequivocally support a vaccine mandate at universities. They set out in painstaking scientific detail how the benefits of the vaccines by far outweigh any argument against them.

Philosophy professor Francis Williamson submitted on behalf of MAM that the vaccine was pointless, as due to waning

efficacy vaccinated people could also get the virus and transmit it.

Both Karim and Dorrington said research showed the vaccine markedly reduced the chances of getting the virus when exposed, decreased the incidences of severe illness, death and so-called long-Covid, and markedly reduced the viral loads in infected people which lessened the chance of transmitting it to others.

"While it is correct that allowing only vaccinated individuals on to [the] campus will not guarantee a 'Covid-free campus' this overlooks the vast and self-evident benefits associated with being vaccinated," Karim said. "A vaccine mandate remains a highly effective tool in protecting the health of those who enter [Rhodes] campus as well as protecting those members of the greater community with whom vaccinated staff

and students may come into contact."

He dismissed MAM's query about whether the university would accept liability if some of those forced to vaccinate

suffered side effects.

He said the government was confident enough in the vaccine to have undertaken to provide compensation for anyone who suffered damaging side effects.

"The flip side is whether [Rhodes] could be held accountable if an employee or student contracted the virus on campus and suffered severe consequences due to a failure

on the part of [Rhodes] to implement a vaccine mandate."

Dorrington said research showed that vaccine mandates were the most effective way to combat the pandemic and,

while protecting the individual, they also worked for the good of the university and the greater community of Makhanda.

The matter is due to be argued on March 1.