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SASOHN

FESTIVE NEWSLETTER



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WARM GREETINGS SASOHN MEMBERS

by Denise Minnie, SASOHN President



Thank you so much for your support and assistance during my term as SASOHN President. It has been an honour and privilege for me to serve and take the society forward especially the last two years of the pandemic. I am most grateful for the wonderful opportunity.

The last two years has been challenging for all of us. But the pandemic has ensured that nurses across the globe has been recognised especially for the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife. Never throughout the SASOHN history has the Occupational Health nurse been challenged or put to the test. The COVID 19 pandemic proved our worth, our calling as nurses and more importantly that we were more than capable to lead, advise, counsel and guide during this time at the workplace. Suddenly we were recognised, and our profession once ignored, became a ray of hope.

The news and on social media, nurses continued being honoured as heroes. The hashtags #healthcareheroes, #yearofthenurse, #nursessavelives, were everywhere! While the rest of the world was complaining, nurses have put their lives and the lives of their families at risk. Sadly, we also lost some of our colleagues and loved ones during this time. As much as it was exhausting, it has also been rewarding that we were able to assist during the pandemic. As occupational health nurses, lets aim to inspire each other, to continue the fight, to continue running into the war zone, to continue stepping up as heroes to save mankind. This generation of nurses will be forever known as the generation that won the war against COVID-19. All nurses and the entire healthcare team will be forever known as heroes who saved the world.



Occupational health nurses, I see each of you as heroes, you ran into a corona war zone while others were running out. And you continue running in day after day, week after week and month after month. I see each of you as brave and courageous. I am proud of each one of you. As some employers continue to exploit us or not provide the correct PPE for us, lets stand together. The world has recognised our worth but its up to us to maintain that status and the only way is to stand tall and continue taking the lead. The pandemic has shown the world that nurses are an indispensable source of hope during sickness, and we will continue to care even when confronted with problems that seem insurmountable. Our 40 years celebrations have shown that SASOHN has stood the test of time and its up to us to ensure that we take the society to another 40 years.

On behalf of myself, Office Bearers and the EXCO team, we wish each of you a blessed Christmas and a safe New year.

And lastly hearty congratulations to Ms Michelle Bester as the incoming President and Ms Khanyoh Zuma as the National Educational Representative for 2022-2024. We wish both of you and the incoming EXCO all the best for your term of office.



The Cocktail SASOHN 40th Conference



SASOHN 40th Conference





KNITTING & CROCHETING

We all know that exercise is good for us. But it's not just about what you do at the gym. It's equally important to find activities that give your mind a workout too. One of our favorites is a hobby shared by people of all ages: knitting!

In many ways, knitting is the ideal hobby. It truly does benefit the mind, the body, and the soul. Let's take a closer look at knitting and find out why it's so good for us.

WESTERN CAPE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: **LET'S NOT PULL THE WOOL OVER YOUR EYES!**

Knitting and crocheting for charity is *an act of love*. Not only is it a fun and useful, creative craft, it is a wonderful method of self-expression. It has become a way to help others for many seniors who joined the Social Responsibility project of SASOHN Western Cape.

The Western Cape region regularly contribute knitted items to a non-profit organization that distributes these items to those in need. The focus is specifically on children and premature infants.





KNITTING & CROCHETING

SOME OF THE BENEFITS INCLUDE:

Lowered blood pressure

Once you have mastered the basic stitches, you can rely on body memory to complete the project. The fingers handle the bulk of the work, and the knitter can enter something like a meditative state. Since repetition allows the mind to relax, you enjoy a simple way to ease stress.

Focusing on a knitting project, sitting down to relax for a few minutes. Not only can this induce a state of relaxation, but it is an excellent stress reliever. The heart rate slows down and blood pressure lowers. Over time, the reduced anxiety and lower blood pressure provides long-term health benefits such as preventing heart disease.



In many ways, knitting is the ideal hobby. It truly does benefit the mind, the body, and the soul. Let's take a closer look at knitting and find out why it's so good for us.

Perhaps that sounds too good to be true? Trust us, you're going to be reaching for a set of needles and a ball of wool by the end of this post!



KNITTING & CROCHETING



Reduced depression and anxiety

Knitting can be quite like meditation for many people. It provides a feeling of calm and happiness. This sense of calm likely comes from the focus on repetitive movements. As you knit, you get into a groove and can just focus on the task at hand. This is similar to the methods used in many types of meditation. Well so they say. My personal experience was the total opposite. Struggling to understand the pattern and overthinking the process, caused stress and anxiety. However, the feeling of calm and accomplishment when I managed to complete my first project was immense.

Slowed onset of dementia

As we age, we must find ways to stimulate our brains to prevent age-related memory loss or dementia. Knitting is full of new skills to learn, such as using multiple needles or discovering a new way to do a stitch. Each project is also different, which provides you with a constant stream of ways to introduce novel concepts to our minds. Whatever project you choose, the brain stimulation involved prevents you from experiencing cognitive decline in your later years.

It improves your hand-eye coordination

Knitting is good for the brain, but it can be good for your body too. Many people have trouble with hand-eye coordination as they age. When you knit regularly, you force your brain and your hands to work together, maintaining your fine motor skills. It can also improve and maintain dexterity and strength in your hands, which can be great for those who would like to improve their grip.

Reduced loneliness and isolation

When people get bored, that's when bad habits start to creep in. If you want to spend less time watching television or find yourself snacking a little too often simply

because you're bored, knitting can break you of your regular patterns. It's also a great way to keep yourself busy when you feel like spending some time on your own. Not everyone is super social, so it's nice to have an activity you can enjoy when you want a little quiet time. It is the perfect answer to dealing with the "Stay Home. Stay Safe" principle during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It's a great social activity. While it's great for doing on your own, many like to sit and knit with others. Knitting groups are being formed and over needles and wool, with a cuppa, many stories are shared.

Gain a sense of accomplishment

Finishing a project gives you something tangible that you can show off to your family and friends. As our project involves small items it accounts for an instant boost, it provides for a sense of accomplishment when they are done.

Knitting helps with chronic pain

The movements involved with knitting build cartilage in the joints and fingers that staves off arthritis. Those who already have arthritis symptoms can reduce joint stiffness and pain through knitting because it keeps the cartilage limber.

Enjoy sharing the skill

Knitting looks magical, and it is common for younger members of the family to ask their loved ones to show them how to knit. Older adults benefit from knowing they can pass a skill down to future generations. Spending time showing a grandchild how to knit also provides seniors with a social opportunity that increases their emotional wellbeing.

WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO THE SASOHN WESTERN CAPE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY CONTRIBUTIONS, VARIOUS KNITTING GROUPS WERE FORMED THAT CONTRIBUTED MONTHLY TOWARDS OUR PROJECT.

KNITTING & CROCHETING



Wellington is a town in the Western Cape Winelands, a 45-minute drive from Cape Town. Wellington's economy is centered on agriculture such as wine, table grapes, deciduous fruit, and a brandy industry. A group of senior ladies meet on a weekly basis and put their love for wool to good use. This is where you can hear the needles of women who love their craft. Who love to care and made knitting a social sport. Together they produce knitted beanies, jerseys, booties, and comfort dolls in support of our social responsibility project.

Following in the steps of the Wellington group knitters joined from Goodwood, Dwarskersbos and as far as Rosetta in KZN.

Acknowledgements:

- The Benefits of Knitting for Personal and Social Wellbeing in Adulthood: Findings from an International Survey.
- Jill Riley, Betsan Corkhill, Clare Morris
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.4276/030802213x13603244419077>

- The Mental Health Benefits of Knitting
<https://mhanational.org/blog/mental-health-benefits-knitting>

In streets that are humming
With the city's stair . . .
Or where leaves fall rustling
Through the quiet air . . .
There are women knitting
Everywhere . . .

Knitting and waiting
Through hours like years -
Not with loud grieving
Nor sighing nor tears -
In their hands the needles
Flash like spears.

Every thread a sorrow,
Every strand a prayer -
('Oh, where sleeps my dear one?
Or how does he fare?')
There are women knitting
Everywhere . . .

By Cicely Fox Smith





Bella Sepalameo

A glimpse into my Master's journey

When I started my graduate studies, I couldn't help but think how nerve-racking it would be to join a class full of senior professionals from various industries. It's nothing like your undergraduate degree, where your fellow students are practically the same age and are on the same path in life. When people found out about my graduate studies, a lot of them asked surprisingly how and why I even considered going back to university. I took the decision to obtain a graduate degree and expand my knowledge in my field of Occupational health.

On a personal note, it was difficult to balance taking care of my home, having a full-time job alongside studying for my Masters. Finding that balance required a lot of time, dedication and energy.

Fear of failure haunted me through my journey, but with the support from my family, colleagues and closest friends, I was able to continue and eliminate the fear.

A post graduate degree is not easy or smooth. It's demanding, challenging, exhausting and stressful, comprising of sleepless nights and a lot of learning to do in a short period of time. I had a couple of breakdowns along the way. But what helped me get through the tough times was the constant reminder of my goal and conjuring up the motivation to get back on the right track. I had a sticky note on my desk with a written reminder of why I had decided to pursue my Master's degree. And this little note helped me persevere throughout this tough journey.

THE REMOTE WORKING CHALLENGE



Are you really seeing the other person on the screen



Now that more businesses are settling into a world where at least some of their people will permanently work from home part or all of the time, the question is how we can maximise the benefits and mitigate the drawbacks.

After the rush to enable remote working, we can now evaluate what is and isn't working.

Working from home isn't all about skipping the commute, working in your pyjamas and sitting at your desk with your cat purring happily in your lap. For many people, social isolation, the lack of corporate structure and disruption of their usual support arrangements (such as schools closing for lockdowns) are beginning to bite.

And while most businesses put the spotlight on the mental and physical wellbeing of their employees earlier in the COVID crisis, many of the special steps and support they offered have now fallen by the wayside. In some cases, employees are being left to make their own way through a health and economic emergency that has yet to end.

To make remote work sustainable as a long-term business model, leading companies will make physical health and mental wellness cornerstones of their business. This is all about creating a culture where colleagues and team leaders make a special effort to really empathise with the people on the other side of the screen. It's also about embedding wellness support into the company's business processes.



Here are a few steps that people-centric companies can consider.

Lead by example

As a business leader or owner, when you set the example everyone else will follow. While you're passionate and engaged in what you do, it's also important to show that you value your own mental and physical wellbeing and work-life balance. Keep a finger on the pulse of your own stress levels, make time for family and exercise, and take sick leave should you need it. This will show your team that you understand productivity, engagement and motivation are at their highest when everyone has a healthy mind and body.

Track leave and absenteeism

Over the past 18 months, school calendars and holiday plans have been severely disrupted. Many members of your team might be powering through without taking leave because they figure they'll wait until they can (properly) travel again. Others might think that they can keep working even with COVID or physical ailments because they're working from home.

An automated HR system will let you track whether your team is taking holidays and sick leave. When people are accumulating leave, you can step in to advise them to take a few days for the sake of their health. Data about sick leave and absenteeism, meanwhile, can offer insight into how your people are doing. High levels of unplanned time off can signal that some of them are struggling.

Offer genuine flexibility

Many workplaces pay lip-service to the idea of flexibility, yet don't offer much flexibility in practice. Recognising the new pressures that working parents are facing, the financial stresses of the pandemic, and the reality of the continued health crisis, empathic managers will know when to cut a team member some slack.

It really should be okay to take time out for family responsibilities or to move an internal meeting because of a personal crisis, without penalty. People in remote working environments will generally be at their best when they're measured on the outcomes they achieve, rather than how many hours they spent at their desk.

Get feedback from your team

Many businesses find it helpful to create regular checkpoints to get feedback on their people are doing. You can conduct employee surveys to find out how people are doing, learn about their perception of the team leaders, and check how engaged and satisfied they are, for instance. The 'stay' interview is another useful tactic.

In a stay interview, you can ask employees why they're choosing to remain with the company, how they are coping, and what they think you could do to create a more engaging work experience. These interviews can help you to nip potential problems in the bud before employees become burnt



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Rather than assuming all is well, they should check how people are really doing and provide them with the support they need.

out or disengaged and eventually leave. It is called the Great Resignation for a reason. Recent research by Microsoft, the 2021 Work Trend Index, showed that 41% of the workforce is considering leaving their employer this year.

Provide mental wellness resources

Many employees in a remote setting may not know where to turn for help if they're anxious, depressed or emotionally depleted. To help, HR and team leaders can offer access to wellness resources, such as mindfulness apps, a recommended psychologist or courses and webinars on stress management, resilience and self-esteem and assertiveness.

Equip managers and leaders with the right tools

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of mental wellness, yet many managers feel that they're not equipped to manage this challenge. Specialised training can help them to better understand the mental health issues members of their team are wrestling with, how to spot when someone is

struggling, and which accommodations to make.

Creating a wellness centred workplace

Remote – or hybrid office/remote-work is likely to be a key part of the future. To make the most of its opportunities, businesses will need to focus on ways of keeping the team connected and involved. Rather than assuming all is well, they should check how people are really doing and provide them with the support they need.

In addition to being the right thing to do, it also delivers tangible returns. According to Discovery, studies conducted by Oxford University and the University of Surrey have found that spending as little as R16 on health promotion strategies (like exercise opportunities, mental wellness days off and screen-time management) can save around R800 of absenteeism, presenteeism and temporary staff costs. That's something to think about!



Reflections of a pandemic

Highlighting the experiences of practitioners in occupational health nursing practice

WRITTEN BY WESTERN CAPE COMMITTEE

How to describe a tumultuous event? Words associated with the pandemic may be unexpected, unknown, unprecedented and at times even unbelievable. The immense losses suffered by so many left no individual untouched as the days became weeks, the week's months and now years of fighting an ever evolving virus. Although the possibility of the outbreak of a coronavirus was not completely unexpected within the medical profession, it was nonetheless sudden as were the nature of the measures implemented to address its invasive presence. Adaptations that were rapidly adopted by those in the healthcare professions as measures to protect their patients but also to keep themselves safe in order to be able to continue to provide care to those in need. A reflection of the emotions evoked and thoughts documented as well as those not yet expressed allows us to gain insight into the individual experiences of Occupational Health Nursing Practitioners (OHNPs). These reflections follow.

When I received the instruction...to reflect

I then came across an article written in March 2020 asking why we react rapidly to pandemics but slow to climate change. According to this article “Psychologists say that humans have evolved to put a greater focus on immediate threats rather than future problems.” Political psychologist Conor Steyle, director of research at one earth future foundation in an interview with BBC stated “Humans are very bad at understanding statistical trends and long-term changes”. Meaning that we have evolved to focus on immediate threats. People find it easier to understand and make sense of COVID-19. They know that contracting the virus will result in becoming ill and they may experience life threatening symptoms. To make matters worse there is the constant reminder about new cases in hospital and the amount of deaths per day. 1.

Following the news of the Disaster Act enforcement by means of a full lockdown, thousands of people rushed to buy toilet paper and other supplies that they thought would sell out. I was reminded of my reaction when I heard about the Coronavirus finding its way to South Africa. I decided to stock up with

flu medication and supplements in the clinic. The employees streamed to the clinic requesting their favourite remedy over the flu season namely “Vitamin C”.

The correlation between the article and what was happening in the clinic was startlingly similar. I then realized that I will have to prioritize and only use the medication when really needed because there was not enough stock on hand and stock was not readily available to purchase. Because of the panic created most people overstocked resulting in empty warehouses, no vitamin C, no Zinc and the list goes on.

In conclusion, COVID-19 is our reality for the unforeseeable future. We need to work together to fight this. Don't buy what you do not need now. We are all in this together.”

1. <https://www.meteomedia.com/ca/nouvelles/article/why-we-react-fast-to-pandemics-coronavirus-but-slow-to-climate-change>

COVID-19 is our reality for the unforeseeable future. We need to work together to fight this.

A typical day in the occupational health clinic

would be conducting medicals (pre placement, periodic and exit) which would include an audiogram, spirometry, vision screening, sometimes biological monitoring and attending to injuries on duty to mention just a few.

In March 2020 these functions changed dramatically and at times, traumatically, due to the COVID-19 virus. The functions were replaced by setting up an isolation room, screening of employees, implementing policies and procedures, health education of staff, sourcing personal protective equipment and identification of high risk employees and consultations with these employees.

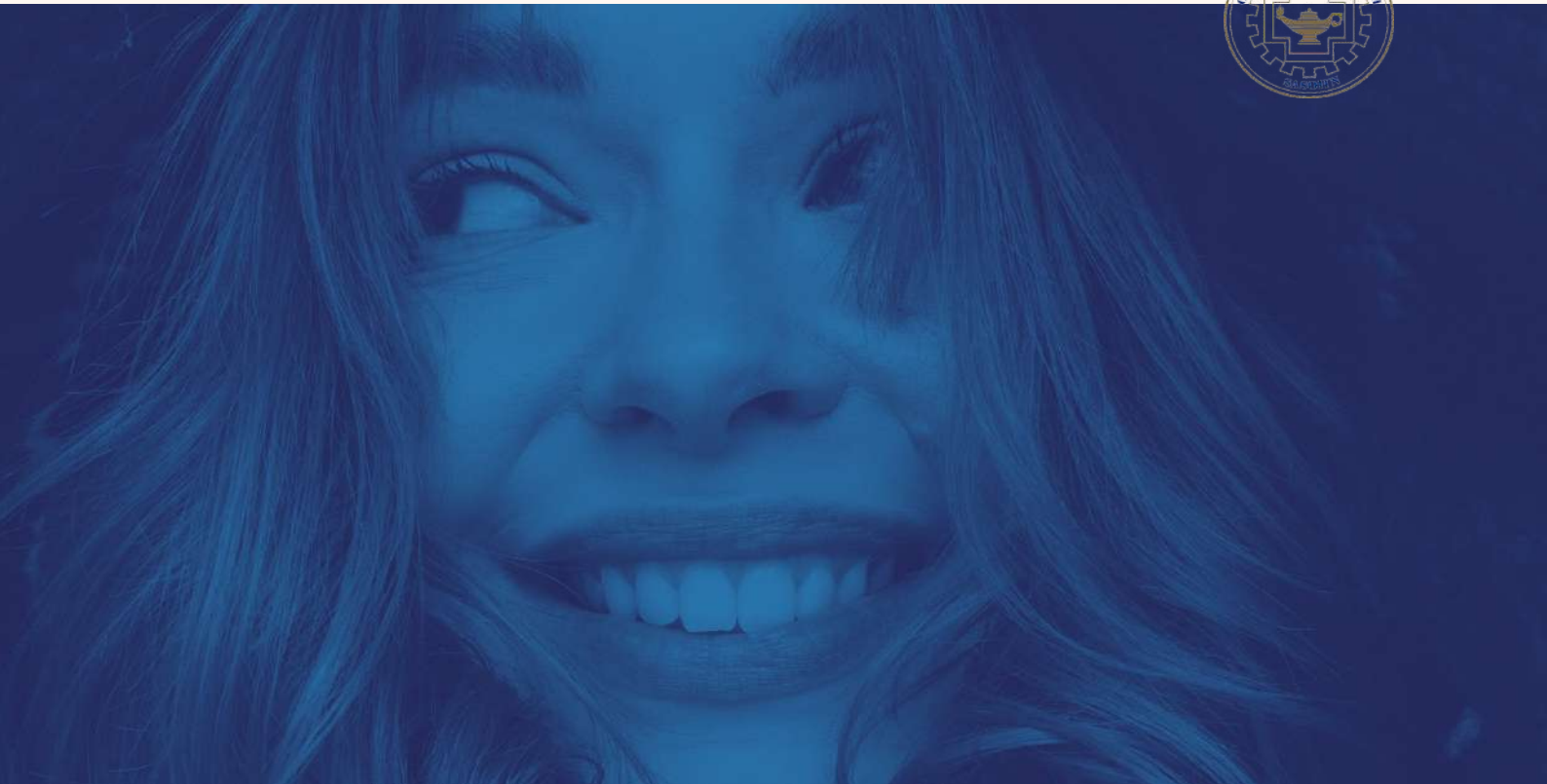
Face shields, facemasks, apron and gloves became a part of the uniform, which had to be changed in between patients as well as the requisite sanitizing of the hands and surfaces. The odour of the "Jik solutions" could be smelt a mile away!

Every time that an employee would enter the clinic I would hold my breath and many a times wish that there was an instrument to measure COVID-19 instantly. History taking, identifying

symptoms, creating a close contact list and referrals to the COVID-19 testing centre became a daily routine and the fear of getting the virus and taking it home to my family would sit heavily on my heart throughout the course of each day.

The company forms part of an essential service with a large number of seasonal workers who stayed in hostels and who all ate in the same dining room, which was a huge hurdle to overcome due to social distancing enforcement of maintaining 1.5 m apart in terms of room occupancy.

When the first employee tested positive for COVID-19 a huge can of worms opened as reality kicked in and it was now very close to home. Contact tracing, isolation, quarantine and reporting the case had to happen. The first question was "Sister am I going to die?" Very politely (with a heart pounding in my chest and a quick prayer for wisdom and calmness) I would re-assure them that all possible would be done to try to prevent this happening. The same rhythm would repeat itself when the family members and close contacts were informed. Hostel placings had to be re-arranged according to teams and two hostels were changed into isolation and quarantine areas. Food had to be delivered in disposable containers as well as training facilitated about how to sanitize and



disinfect the rooms, toilets and bathroom as well as care for and handle COVID-19 positive waste. Employees in these two facilities had to be monitored for 14 days. Some of the employees that tested positive could not isolate at home and arrangements had to be made for them to isolate at an identified Government facility. Seasonal workers could not return home to the Eastern Cape due to the National lockdown. Some of them lost their loved ones at home due to COVID-19 and had to be informed about this sad news by the OHNPs, who had to deal with all the resulting emotions of the workers as well as cope with her own. It felt like we were stuck in a tsunami that would continue for months.

Management stayed at a distance from the clinic and the OHNP because of the fear of coming too close to the high risk area and potentially contracting the virus.

It is so sad that the OHNP is mostly forgotten and often not seen in the same light as the nurses working in the hospitals, yet most of the OHNPs work alone in the various clinics with no one to bounce ideas off of or lean on for support.

I salute all the OHNPs for their selfless service to overcome the barriers associated with COVID-19. I would like to remind each OHNP that they have the potential to overcome each obstacle that they may face as they are truly hero's!"

At first, “The Corona virus” was something

other countries had to be concerned about about and then it got closer, too close for comfort... too close to home. Reality set in when President Cyril Ramaphosa announced that South Africa would enter a nationwide lockdown for 21-days with effect from midnight on Thursday 26 March 2020. In retrospect, “My Fellow South Africans...” and the regulations that followed became the opening to proclamations dreaded by most but on hearing it initially it evoked many questions. What did it mean? What would need to be done? It was a confusing time and as occupational health forms part of essential services; the implication was that we would need to continue to work. We would need to prepare ourselves, our companies, and our practitioners for the possibility of being infected whilst at work. I did not know quite how to approach all the changes anticipated, and I felt both concerned and rather confused.

As the legal framework for workplaces during the pandemic became known, prospective new clients identified a sudden need for a service during the lockdown. In 3 days, we had to prepare to operate fully functional units, adequately staffed, with all the necessary

equipment, including Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). How the Level 5 lockdown would play out, no one knew.

On the one hand, I saw employers initiating processes to protect their business and staff in a calm and collected manner, which was essential to reduce any possible anxiety. On the other hand, I saw media statements that alerted me to the opposite: panic!

Our working days lengthened as screeners started work at 04:45 and worked until 23:30 in many instances. Working hours were long, and some questions had no answers as we just did not know what to expect or how to respond appropriately. We, the essential workers in Occupational Health settings kept the doors open for industries and were exposed at a different level. We were part of the many people behind the scenes working to allow others to remain healthy and safe during this time. Suddenly management looked to us for answers and the development of policies. We were flooded with information from various resources and trying to keep updated and stay abreast of change became challenging. We were attending virtual sessions on various platforms but it seemed that as soon as we became comfortable with Zoom for example an invitation on MS Teams, Google meet or Cisco Webex would arrive bringing a different set of challenges!



We had to continue to go to a physical location to work instead of working remotely and this entailed, for some, being around people each day essentially putting us as the healthcare workers and therefore our families at risk. Working during the pandemic has also been frightening as you see your co-workers contract the virus, then become nervous thinking that you might have it. Life became a cycle to evaluate your exposure, having to self-monitor and even self-isolate. Along the path, some also became COVID-19 positive and some lost their lives. It is important that we recognize these modern-day heroes, many of whom were not healthcare workers, that continued to work so that we could continue with our lives.

We gained new skills, we became COVID-19 screeners and later we were trained to conduct Rapid Antigen and Antibody screenings as some of our clients required these. Now we are also trained vaccinators! As our skill sets increased so our workload increased to the point where many practitioners were and still are, struggling to keep all the balls in the air.

We are also managing the reality of this changed landscape in that we need to consider when it would be safe to continue with our medical surveillance, including audiometry and spirometry. Specifically, when would it be safe to do so for both the practitioner and the client? Now, eighteen months later we remain concerned but know that we have some knowledge and experience to make informed decisions.

I cannot over emphasise the importance of continuing to support, acknowledge and thank the essential workers within our communities."



What an experience!

Nothing that we could have prepared for. For me the worst feeling was when I went to work on the first day of Level 5 lockdown and there was not one vehicle or any other people on the road! Secondly having to have a permit to be on the road –the fear of not having it, checking and checking again that you have it!

On a positive note, the OHNP was included in all the virtual meetings with top management from the onset of the pandemic and this was probably the first time that we had ever had the opportunity to liaise directly with the Managers. In the past you will have known their names but not have met or engaged with them. Hopefully the collaboration between the occupational health clinic and management will continue in the future.

There is not much to say

about the coronavirus pandemic that has not been said already. It has indeed turned our lives and the world upside down.

It is never easy changing jobs, but when COVID-19 is added to the mix, one's comfort zone is definitely breached.

On the 1 March 2020, I commenced working as the Wellness Coordinator of a well-known pathology laboratory. One of the additions to job description was to develop and implement a national occupational medical surveillance programme, while intensifying the wellness outreach to all staff.

On Thursday March 5, the National Institute for Communicable Diseases confirmed that a suspected case of COVID-19 had tested positive. South Africa's first COVID-19 infection.

On 15th March 2020, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, declared a National State of Disaster in Government Gazette 313.

The country went into lockdown from midnight 26 March, a situation that we

were all hopeful would end on 30 April 2020. Nineteen months later, we are still in a state of disaster.

The SARS CoV 2 virus is unique and has presented distinctive challenges at all levels of management: characteristics, transmissibility, health effects, both physical and mental.

As a pathology laboratory, staff have been at the forefront of the efforts to detect virus: the nurses and phlebotomists taking the PCR swabs and the laboratory staff analysing them. Support and enabling departments have also been under a lot of pressure to ensure the timely dissemination of hundreds and thousands of results to doctors, hospitals and patients.

The almost constant pressure with little "down time" between waves has seen an increase in the numbers of staff members suffering from stress, anxiety and tiredness, both physical and mental. Health care workers have been vulnerable to acquiring the infection by virtue of their jobs which has resulted in people being away from work in isolation or in quarantine with the resulting pressure on their colleagues. The COVID-19 stress has in many cases been "the straw that broke the camel's back" as people were already battling with socio-economic and / or relationship issues before the pandemic. "Long COVID" is



another real obstacle to returning to work and being able to function fully.

Along with a new awareness of occupational health and safety as a discipline, mental health has also been thrust into the public consciousness. While there are resources available, particularly if one can afford them, there is an enormous need for better state health interventions and facilities. There have been great initiatives like the "Health Care Workers Care Network."

As described on their website: "Healthcare workers are exhausted, stressed, and at high risk for physical and mental illness as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to take its toll in South Africa. Top South African medical, clinical, and professional associations are collaborating to bring much-needed support and care to healthcare workers across the country.

The Healthcare Workers Care Network (HWCN) is a nationwide healthcare worker support network which offers all healthcare workers across the public and private sectors free support, pro bono therapy, resources, training and psychoeducation. The HWCN already has over five hundred volunteer mental health professionals, including psychiatrists, psychologists, GPs, registered counsellors, and social workers, who will provide help, intervention, and support to all healthcare workers. These include doctors, nurses, community healthcare workers, field workers, hospital or clinic personnel, including hospital laundry staff, and porters." [1]

Unfortunately, many private resources, including medical aid benefits, have not been made more accessible, even to members, and seemingly unable to put people before profits.

1. (<https://www.healthcareworkerscarenetwork.org.za/>)



In describing my experience, I am going to focus on three challenges

that I faced during the COVID-19 epidemic. These were on-line teaching through virtual media, coping with working from home and working in the CPUT Vaccination Centre.

Due to the phasing out of the postgraduate BTech: Occupational Health Nursing programme, I was appointed to teach our 2020 intake of students for the new undergraduate Bachelor Degree programme.

We started our teaching with face-to-face contact however, with the onset of COVID-19 at the end of March 2020, had to adjust our offering and teaching strategies. For the first time we were faced with the challenge of teaching our students through virtual media such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and CPUT's

Learner Management System, Black Board learning.

This was an immense challenge and steep learning curve as I had not taught virtually before. I had to learn very quickly how to set up meetings, present PowerPoints and facilitate lessons online and my IT skills had to improve almost overnight. Much of my communication with my students was through WhatsApp messages and emails, which I found frustrating and time-consuming and encroached on my home time. Online marking was a further new challenge to be mastered. I had to record my sessions for students to view at a later stage and found it quite disconcerting when I heard myself afterwards. However, this assisted me in making changes in the way that I speak and present during class sessions – so another learning curve! An advantage of learning to conduct online meetings is that I was better prepared for when we began holding our SASOHN meetings online where I was expected to give feedback virtually and assist with sharing of presentations.



I also had to adjust to working from home. Drawing boundaries between work and home life was a struggle as I found that I continued working into the evenings instead of stopping after a normal working day. Departmental meetings were also held online – requiring intense concentration for long periods which was very tiring. To discuss and follow up on issues, I found myself making use of Teams meetings in the late afternoon or early evenings thereby extending my working day. Working from home was particularly difficult for me as I missed the camaraderie of colleagues and daily communication and touching base on issues for discussion and quick answers to queries. I realised how important personal contact is for me to keep me focused and upbeat and prevent me from becoming too introspective. Virtual meeting fatigue became a very real issue that I am still struggling with.

During 2021, CPUT was designated as an accredited vaccination centre for the CPUT staff and students and this service was extended to the community/public. The lecturers in our department underwent training to administer vaccines. As lecturers whose main tasks as academics are teaching and learning, administration and curriculum development, contact with the community/public as clients is limited.

After training, I was allocated to the Vaccine Centre on rotation once or twice a week or two weeks for a few months.

I had to relook at my interpersonal skills in dealing with the public as clients and I must admit that I was nervous when I had to administer my first vaccine. Techniques for administering injections have changed since my days in practice and needed adjusting to. However, it is quite amazing how old skills and experience come to the fore. Dealing with these clients forced me to engage on a personal level with people on first contact and on a one-to-one basis; which reminded me of the essence of nursing and I began to enjoy the contact.

Like most people, I had feelings of isolation to overcome and the frustration of the curtailing of daily activities and adjusting to lockdown directives. But, on a brighter note, I also had the opportunity to engage with clients and remember my practice as a nurse; and learn new skills that will stand me in good stead in our new technological age.

*Essential workers have held
things together for
industries right around the
world*



Essential workers have held things together for industries right around the world, and in recognising their efforts we have had a wonderful insight into the human resource side of the pandemic – the hard work, endless shift patterns and constancy of being “on call” – and seeing this helps us realise that we are all only human. It has been a humbling experience for leaders around the globe, as they too have had to become more human, revealing their own vulnerabilities and personal challenges when working in isolation, from the kitchen table, with kids and pets running around!

- “The experiences of essential workers are already shaping organisational policy, with many organisations creating remote and flexible working opportunities, opening new forms of communication channels, and leaders listening more intently to the aspirations, needs and desires of their team. Covid has become a remarkable opportunity for “levelling the playing field” and allowing leaders and their organisations to consider how they wish to create a brave new world, post-pandemic”.

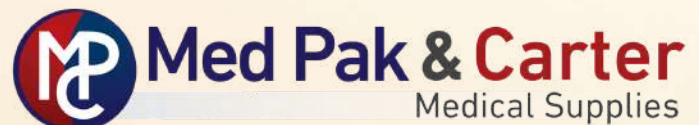
Quote by Professor Andrew Sharman

SPECIAL THANKS TO THE EXHIBITORS



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