

## Editorial

# Nurses be prepared – the population needs us in these dire circumstances

Globally the 2020 Year of the Nurse and Midwife was filled with planned celebrations, professional gatherings, campaigns, projects and retrospective reviews of our nursing careers. Not in my worst nightmares did anything like the COVID-19 ever appear as part of the Year of the Nurse and Midwife celebrations. The quick spread of the pandemic globally has increased the pressure on healthcare systems and pushed healthcare workers to the frontline of this pandemic that has already claimed thousands of lives. Our country was so far from the burning issue in China – what a rude awakening on Sunday 15 March 2020 with the President's announcement! Thank you to all the nurses and other healthcare professionals who already had systems in place when the first case arrived in our country. Everything seemed to be under control, but is the view from the side the reality? Is this a crisis to be solved soon, or will this become the "normal" for many months to come?

COVID-19, a pandemic new to all of us, is slowly but surely putting the health and care sectors under extreme pressure. Our country suddenly realised that many services taken for granted are services we cannot survive without – food stores, farmers, factories, laundries, hygiene services, just to name a few, essential services such as health care, safety, security, water and sanitation – we cannot function without their support and infrastructure.

The pressure on the healthcare services within a country with extreme staff shortages is posing a threat – a threat we will have to deal with urgently. Healthcare professionals are exposed to the virus as part of the population, and the additional exposure to the virus in the workplace increases their chances of falling ill. We cannot wait to see what is going to happen, we must be proactive. With no time to train new entrants, very limited time to upskill the few available nurses, what are the options?

In countries such as Italy, a call on the retired healthcare workers had positive results. They had to start working with only their passion and the drive to assist the sick and the needy. We are confident that as soon as the need for those professionals not

currently practising is expressed, they will follow their passion and return to care for the patients.

We need to convince our training facilities that there is no time to wait, they have to assist with successfully reintegrating those workers into a much-changed healthcare environment. This pandemic will require nurses and other healthcare professionals to be flexible and be prepared to work in unfamiliar areas and circumstances – everything for the benefit of the patients, families and to curb the rapid spread of the virus. This will be stressful, and the only way to assist is to be equipped and upskilled before the patient numbers become a crisis. Pro-active training must be offered in infection prevention and control, basic life support, medication management and client support.

When we one day look back at these challenging times, it must be evident that we did not sleep on the job but that we used every resource available to competently care for patients and their families.

A plea to all our nurses to rise to the challenge, so that yet again we will prove that in these unfamiliar and trying circumstances we will use our professional skills and judgment to assess the risks and to apply our competencies to ensure safe care based on our ethical principles and professional standards. But as ordinary citizens, let us also heed the call of healthcare workers globally to practise social distancing, self-isolation and hand washing to limit the spread of the disease.

The focus of the 2020 Year of the Nurse and Midwife now is on the contribution that the profession can make to the health and welfare of our population. What an opportunity, let the profession take this in our hearts and minds, let us act and live the core of what we do – with compassion, love, dedication and a will to improve the lives of our nation. And be safe while doing so.

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