

# THE BULLETIN

A National HealthCare Group Publication

## Thousands of heroic healthcare workers enlist in the fight against COVID-19

*As the coronavirus pandemic spread across the world the heroism, dedication and selflessness of the men and women of the South African healthcare industry, who stepped forward to serve the nation in one of its darkest hours, has resonated with all of us.*

Sadly, South Africa's healthcare professionals have not been spared the ravages of COVID-19. While more than 27 000 South African healthcare workers including doctors, nurses, paramedics and others have contracted the virus, more than 240 healthcare workers had succumbed to COVID-19 by 23 August 2020.

The majority of the infected healthcare workers were nurses, with 14 143 positive cases reported, while medical doctors made up 1 644, or six percent, of those infected.

In paying tribute to South Africa's healthcare professionals, Dr Reinder Nauta, Executive Chairperson of the National HealthCare Group, expressed his deep gratitude to South Africa's heroic 'soldiers' who enlisted in their thousands to fight the coronavirus without question or hesitation.

"Each and every death of a healthcare professional is one too many, particularly in a country such as ours where healthcare is a scarce and valuable resource. On behalf of National HealthCare Group, I wish to express my profound appreciation to our doctors, nurses, paramedics and other healthcare workers for their dedication and commitment during these difficult times. Our country's healthcare professionals have taken unity and selflessness to a new level. We, the South African healthcare industry and those who rely on you for care, are forever indebted to you."

## A giant leap forward for private primary healthcare accessibility

*The accessibility of private primary healthcare in South Africa has taken a leap forward with the introduction of a novel ultra-affordable primary care product by the National HealthCare Group during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in May.*

MediClub Connect™, a WhatsApp-based primary healthcare service, provides members with online interactive access to doctors and nurses via WhatsApp. For an unbeatable rate, with no attendant risk, employees receive physical consultations with doctors on referral, as well as all prescribed medication along with other key services.

Fast-food chain, Hungry Lion, which signed up approximately 3 000 staff members across South Africa, was one of the first companies to introduce the MediClub Connect™ benefit into the workplace.

Explaining the philosophy behind the decision to extend healthcare cover at a time when the company was forced to close due to national lockdown regulations, Hungry Lion chief executive officer, Adrian Basson, says that while the company had closed for the lockdown it was fortunately in a position to continue paying staff salaries.

"As the pandemic really brought home the importance of health, we decided that healthcare cover should be expanded beyond managers and assistant managers to include vulnerable workers who should not have to risk visiting public health facilities if they are ill," adds Basson.

"I appealed to National HealthCare executive chair, Dr Reinder Nauta, to devise a plan to ensure that all our employees could get professional medical help safely if they fell ill during the crisis. We were already paying for more than 260 managers, assistant managers and head office staff to belong to National HealthCare's primary healthcare plan. With the introduction of MediClub Connect™, everyone now benefits from quality primary care, at an unbeatable rate, with no attendant risk."

Commenting on the development, Dr Nauta says that the ability to respond to increased demand from employers and medical schemes to lower healthcare costs, while broadening access to healthcare services, sets this initiative apart, and addresses these pressing priorities in the South African healthcare sector.

## Three thousand retrenched individuals to benefit from free primary care service

*“Three million South Africans have lost their jobs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while of those who managed to keep their jobs, 1.5 million did not have an income.”*

The Business & Human Rights Resource Centre – 16 July 2020

In light of this dire situation, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, Patrick Lubbe, chief executive officer of National HealthCare Group recently announced that the company would be offering 3 000 free MediClub Connect™ subscriptions to retrenched individuals.

The subscriptions would be made available for a period of six months to those who have been retrenched or are facing retrenchment. During this time the recipients of the MediClub Connect™ subscriptions will have access to a WhatsApp-based primary healthcare service which will offer them online interactive access to doctors and nurses via WhatsApp. They will benefit from free physical consultations with doctors on referral, as well as all prescribed medication along with other key services.

The subscriptions, which are valued at more than R2 million, will be made available to the employees of client companies via their healthcare consultants.

**“The subscriptions would be made available for a period of six months to those who have been retrenched or are facing retrenchment.”**

## Golf caddies and kitchen workers receive the ‘gift of health’

*Several weeks of lockdown and social distancing in the time of COVID-19 have taken their toll on every aspect of life as we knew it. Even leisure activities, such as golfing, have not gotten away*

As part of National HealthCare’s drive to improve access to private, primary healthcare services to South African workers, caddies and kitchen staff at the Zwartkop Golf Club were recently provided with free access to MediClub Connect™.

The much-needed ‘gift of health,’ was facilitated by supporting healthcare advisors, Leap SA. Until now the employees had not enjoyed the benefit of private primary healthcare services.

Their employer, former South African golfer Dale Hayes, who is also a respected golf commentator, has welcomed the opportunity to make this unique product available to support staff members during these difficult times.

According to National HealthCare Group business development executive, Rueon Rapoza, access to the novel WhatsApp-based healthcare service will make it easy for the staff members of the Zwartkop Golf Club to remain safe and healthy while obtaining professional healthcare assistance when needed - no matter whether they find themselves at home or at work.

While this opportunity is being offered only via a handful of supporting brokers such as PSG, NMG, Khusa Consulting, Leap Employee Benefits and Mozee Consulting, feedback and interest have been most positive. Rapoza added that the introduction of MediClub Connect™ service at Zwartkop Golf Club has already led to other employers in the golfing fraternity wanting the same for their staff and final discussions are well underway.



## A member's story

*The ink was hardly dry on the agreement signed between fast-food chain, Hungry Lion and National HealthCare Group when a distressed new Hungry Lion MediClub Connect™ member requested assistance with a medical condition...*

*By 21 May \*Nomsa Maci had been experiencing an ongoing tension headache, which had been affecting her jugular vein severely, for more than two weeks. She had taken Grand-Pa and Panado to try and alleviate the pain, but nothing seemed to resolve her problem.*

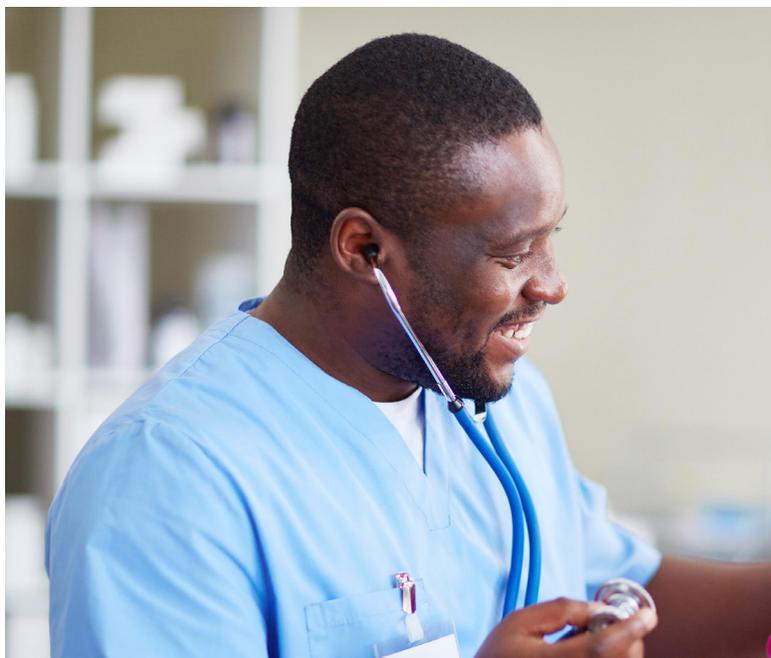
*Having recently learnt about MediClub Connect™ for Hungry Lion employees she decided to put the brand-new WhatsApp service to the test in the hope that she would find some form of relief.*

*Within minutes the nurse on call contacted her telephonically and after a consultation with her, Nomsa was advised to visit a local General Practitioner for a face-to-face consultation to address the underlying problem.*

*The nurse on call reached out to a local General Practitioner in Idutywa in the Eastern Cape to set up a consultation for the member. The General Practitioner accepted the contract and was more than happy to help Nomsa and to also see other Hungry Lion MediClub Connect™ members in the area going forward.*

*The member consulted with the doctor, and the nurse on call reached out the following day to ascertain if the member was indeed assisted. The member was extremely satisfied, which is an endorsement of the MediClub Connect™ service in providing employees efficient access to good quality primary care during the current COVID-19 pandemic.*

*\*Not her real name*



## Neglect primary healthcare at our society's peril

Dr Reinder Nauta  
Executive Chairperson  
National HealthCare Group

*It is ironic that in a time when healthcare is most needed and is demonstrating its immense value in the fight against COVID-19, many general practitioners are reportedly seeing a drop in patient numbers that threatens the livelihood of their practices.*

General practitioners have an important role in supporting the psychosocial wellbeing of society. Apart from health screenings for cancer or diabetes, GPs are often the first to detect mental health issues and substance use disorders.

They provide an immense – and often underappreciated – health education service to patients that has value far beyond the patient's immediate health concern. Doctors empower their patients to address unhealthy lifestyle habits today, to prevent the development of more serious health problems in future. Patients are able to address unhealthy lifestyle habits early to prevent the development of more serious health problems in years to come.

Recent debate over how private GP practices can remain sustainable while patient demand has all but dried up, has primarily focused on the role that medical schemes could play in alleviating doctors' financial distress. For the privileged few who can afford to belong to a medical scheme, day-to-day benefits are a luxury many are foregoing in favour of hanging on to a hospital plan in the face of rising annual membership fees.

It is abundantly clear to those on the ground, that we desperately need doctors, and all the indirect value they can potentially contribute to our individual and collective wellbeing, productivity and development. We have to find ways of making healthcare more accessible to reach many more lives – those of every South African: men, women and, crucially, the children who hold the key to our nation's future prosperity.

Many of our GPs are in crying need of a sustainable income from patients. We thus need creative models for funding private primary healthcare to fulfil the need in society and to avoid losing these doctors.

A fresh approach outside of the traditional medical scheme or healthcare insurance models is needed. An employment benefit model, whereby employers subscribe to the services of a network of GPs for a nominal monthly admin fee and are only charged for a consultation when the need arises, provides a practical alternative – costing on average less than the employee's Unemployment Insurance Fund contribution.

Broadening access to private primary healthcare for employees and their families, while keeping the doors of doctors in private practice open, is achievable to the mutual benefit and satisfaction of all.

There is no time to be lost. Now is the time to strengthen access to primary healthcare while supporting doctors to help stabilise a healthcare system and a country that is being profoundly shaken by this pandemic. Whether it is expertly lanced or left to its own devices, the festering boil of need is building painful pressure that demands release.

# In Memoriam

*“Legends never die in our dreams  
because they will always live within our hearts.”*

Anthony T. Hincks

The National HealthCare Group deeply mourns the loss of five colleagues who were part of our national doctor network across South Africa. They were deeply valued within their communities and were highly respected by their colleagues, patients and staff members.

We remember our colleagues

- Tulbagh-based community doctor Dr Roelof Botha who passed away on 1 June 2020.
- Uitenhage-based Dr Buyile Tom who passed away on 12 June 2020.
- Umtata-based Dr Nobuntu Songca who passed away in June 2020.
- Pimville-based Dr Phakamile Patrick (PP) Mtangai who passed away on 7 July 2020.
- Port Elizabeth-based Dr Elizabeth-Mamisa Chabula-Nxiweni who was an ECIPA member. She passed away on 23 July 2020.
- Dr Ismail Cassim of Lenasia in Johannesburg passed away on Sunday, 13 September, 2020.

We wish to convey our sincere condolences to their loved ones, friends, staff members and patients. They were valued beyond measure and will be deeply missed by all who had the privilege of knowing them. Not only did they contribute richly to the South African healthcare industry but each of these doctors played an active role in making healthcare more accessible.

**“ Not only did they contribute richly to the South African healthcare industry but each of these doctors played an active role in making healthcare more accessible. ”**

