

Helping hand for the golden years

Access to quality healthcare services is an ongoing challenge for many, but perhaps most especially for those who are no longer able to work, are in a less mobile stage of life and who have a higher rate of chronic illness – the elderly.

According to Dr Reinder Nauta, chair of the National HealthCare Group, the elderly and vulnerable in South Africa are heavily under-resourced when it comes to accessing the healthcare they need.

“This is particularly regrettable when one considers that simple primary healthcare interventions can go such a long way to avoiding unnecessary illness in those over 65, the age group most likely to develop chronic disease. It is for this reason that we recently partnered with a remarkable organisation that supports those who all their lives have contributed to society and who now need help in accessing the care they deserve,” says Nauta.

Restoring dignity and respect is core to what Cape Town-based Neighbourhood Old Age Homes (Noah) does for social pensioners to ensure that their basic needs of housing, food and healthcare are met through socio-economic support.

Anne Dobson, director of Noah, says that the most prominent conditions being treated at the organisation’s two primary healthcare clinics are diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol and arthritis.

“The elderly as a sector is not considered high on the list of funding priorities. The majority of Corporate Social Investment spend in



MJ from Noah.

PHOTO: ESTENE VORSTER

SA is directed towards education, followed by healthcare, but not particularly for older generations who are usually faced with additional challenges around access,” she explains.

Dobson says that the impact of Covid-19 on the elderly has been harsh, affecting even those who previously were able to maintain more healthy lives. One such indi-

vidual at Noah is known as MJ, who led an active lifestyle and generally had a sociable, positive outlook on life. MJ had moved into one of the communal Noah homes for independent social pensioners in January 2020. However, with the implementation of lockdown her freedom to get out and be active was limited, her mood changed, and her relationships were taking

strain.

“She began sleeping all day and making unhealthy food choices, which was particularly dangerous for her as a diabetic,” notes Dobson.

“She was immediately booked to see the doctor who diagnosed her with depression and prescribed antidepressants. Her blood sugar levels were also high. She was counselled about the necessity of eating correctly and taking her meds as prescribed. However, after a month there was no noticeable change in her behaviour and her blood sugar levels were still raised.

“At that point we discussed with her the option of being enrolled in the Noah community-based care programme to receive daily meals, assistance with personal hygiene and general cleaning. She agreed that it would be the best way forward,” she says.

From then, MJ became a table boarder at the centre which meant she had to walk two blocks three times a day to come and eat her meals, encouraging her to be active and maintain independence whilst receiving caring support.

“Not only is she now getting the exercise and balanced nutrition she needs but is also enjoying being sociable with other Noah members. MJ even does shopping for some of the less independent residents who are not able to walk to the shops, which gives her purpose and a sense of belonging. She is living a meaningful life again. Her mood and physical activity have improved, she is no longer depressed, and her blood sugar levels and diabetes are controlled,” says

Dobson.

The National HealthCare Group recently made a donation to Noah to help ensure that elderly individuals receive the quality primary healthcare services they need. A portion of the donation is towards quality healthcare for the patients at the Noah Clinic Site B, Khayelitsha, while the second part is for the Noah Woodstock Clinic to ensure that chronic and acute conditions are well-managed, treatment adherence is achievable, and protection against Covid-19 is provided.

“More than 600 social pensioners will benefit from this donation, which will assist Noah in continuing to provide quality healthcare for the elderly, who deserve to live with dignity in their golden years,” says Nauta.

“The National HealthCare Group is committed to providing ongoing assistance at primary healthcare level for communities and organisations such as this as well as funding services for quality healthcare access on a wider scale in the country’s employer market.

“So much unnecessary discomfort and financial strain can be avoided if medical conditions are addressed early on with primary healthcare. This is an area of healthcare where greater access is imperative if we as a nation are ever to address the needs of the millions of individuals that make up our communities and workforces,” he concludes.

Other organisations and individuals wishing to get involved in assisting Noah can contact Anne Dobson via email at anne@noah.org.za.