



**7 July 2020**

## **UCT medical team assists in the CTICC ‘Hospital of Hope’**

University of Cape Town (UCT) staff members from the Faculty of Health Sciences are part of a team involved in the operation of the ‘Hospital of Hope’ at the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC). The CTICC was repurposed into an 862-bed field hospital as part of the Western Cape Government’s health strategy to increase capacity to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its communities.

In order to fulfil its vision of “providing high-quality, team-based person-centred care”, Associate Professor Klaus von Pressentin, head of the Division of Family Medicine at UCT, said the clinical teams are multi-disciplinary in nature with a strong family medicine focus. They include nurses, physiotherapists, dietitians, social workers, radiographers and pharmacists.

The facility’s care package, said Von Pressentin, is tailored to patients diagnosed with moderate COVID-19 disease in need of inpatient oxygen therapy whose disease profile is complicated with existing chronic conditions, and patients with a care plan which is predominantly focused on palliative care.

The Hospital of Hope facility is staffed by health workers from diverse backgrounds: Cuban health workers, as well as South African health workers who were recruited from the private sector, deployed from existing posts in the public health system and/or local higher education institutions.

A number of divisions within UCT’s Faculty of Health Sciences have contributed to this project, including Emergency Medicine, Family Medicine and the Primary Health Care Directorate. Professor Lee Wallis and his emergency medicine team have helped plan the intermediate care facilities during the commissioning phase and are managing the interfacility transfer processes and acute facilities’ bed bureau.

Von Pressentin and Dr Tasleem Ras have been assigned as clinical managers of the facility. They are supported by a strong clinical team, which includes several family physicians and family medicine registrars. Professor Steve Reid from the Primary Health Care Directorate has joined the team to help facilitate interprofessional learning conversations and create a learning culture.

Just a few months ago, Dr Abhaya Karki and Dr Nabeela Amien, two senior family medicine registrars from UCT, could not have imagined being part of such a team that would set up a field hospital from scratch – from preparing beds to welcoming the first patients and leading one of the multidisciplinary teams who look after acutely ill COVID-19 patients. The duo have described it as “the experience of a lifetime”.

Amien and Karki are part of a team of eight clinical team leaders responsible for managing doctors at the facility and for providing patient care.

“The biggest success that this team has had is that of starting something from scratch and managing to keep it running successfully with incredibly high standards of care. COVID-19 is a disease that can bring about anxiety and fear in even the strongest-minded clinicians, yet at the CTICC Hospital of Hope patients are still treated with compassion and respect. The amount of passion I have seen from the staff is absolutely incredible,” said Amien.

One of the biggest challenges faced by health workers at the facility is the fear of not being able to cope with the vast number of patients. Amien said the influx of patients will result in strain among the staff and may lead to high levels of burnout. She explained that it is thus very important that there are measures in place to ensure efficiency, that staff remain motivated by sharing success stories, and to let staff know that they are appreciated.

Karki said the hardest part is having to communicate with families after they have lost a loved one but the camaraderie between health workers is a huge asset.

“We support each other. We value each other and deep down knowing that all of us have volunteered to be here and serve is a humbling feeling. I use humour to support my group. We laugh, and when we cry, we cry together. But we communicate with each other. I always ask them how they are feeling – just to get an idea of where they are emotionally.”

Experiencing a pandemic first-hand has also provided a steep learning curve for the family medicine registrars, who have realised the importance of teamwork and have used this opportunity to reflect and improve on their interpersonal skills.



Drs Nabeela Amien and Abhaya Karki.

Photo: Supplied

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***ENDS***

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