

Incoming President's message

As I reflect on what lies ahead in the next 2 years, I am reminded of the African proverb *'The best way to eat an elephant in your path is to cut him up into little pieces.'* This means that the best approach to solving a problem is to take it bit by bit; one at a time. The South African Thoracic Society has excellence in training, research and advocacy in lung health as its core mandate. Sustaining and improving on this is no small task, especially in the face of the many challenges we face as a respiratory society which is reflective of our context in South Africa today.

Excellence in the face of an economy that is largely shrinking, with austerity measures which have impacted all of us in our various institutions, both in private and public sector, is a significant threat to our training and academic programs. We need to be nimble and find solutions to in a small but significant way, not only advocate for training posts through the department of health, but also third-stream funds to build and sustain our workforce. We must leverage opportunities through public/private partnerships and philanthropic/donor funding or through Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). Ongoing discussions through the College of Medicine for private practice colleagues' assistance with training of registrars is another potential route to explore in a coordinated way for sub-specialist training which could also potentially unlock funding opportunities.

Building research capacity and collaborative work across the country requires nurturing. Engagement of early career members of our society in research and mentorship is critical if respiratory research is to be sustained in SATS. Our society has a proud history of research excellence, with at least 3 A-rated scientists from our society. We must continue to support our future research leaders through seed funding with research grants, and opportunities to share their work at our congress. Our journal is now one of our flagship activities and under the direction of Prof Dheda secured PubMed Central listing, DHET accreditation and is receiving increasing international

contributions. Exploring opportunities for mentoring our junior colleagues to editorial roles and internship programs within the journal and inclusion in guideline development could be one such opportunity for our early career researchers.

We have had excellent national paediatric and adult pulmonology CME programs. Moving forward, we should also explore opportunities for working with our sister societies such as the European Respiratory Society, of which we are all members, to look at ways to enhance our CME activities and learning, and training platforms to diversify our educational offering to our members.

As we navigate through the next 2 years, I hope we will make small but significant strides working together with Prof Richard Van Zyl-Smit, our immediate Past President and the incoming EXCO, to continue to build and strengthen our society, and our global footprint. I am humbled by the societies' faith in me leading it over the next term and look forward to serving you all with our excellent team.

As we are in Women's month, I am struck that I am the second female President of the society and the first African. I leave you with the words of Barack Obama which I think apply to our current times

'For all the cruelty and hardship of our world, we are not mere prisoners of fate — our actions matter.'

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