

Human rights – what have we done to prevent it?

Reflecting on especially the Life Esidimeni tragedy professional mental health bodies and university entities have embarked on a series of lectures, panel discussions and exhibitions to share principles and best practice and raise anew awareness of the human rights challenges in health care.

Professor Bernard Janse van Rensburg, President of South African Society of Psychiatrists (SASOP), says that the *Human Rights for People with Mental Illness* program was developed from the question often asked during the Life Esidimeni investigations “what have you done to prevent it?” The program also consisting of a German exhibition of posters on human rights abuses under National Socialism in Europe is currently being presented in Johannesburg during July and from September will road show across the country exploring the role of professional societies and individual clinicians to uphold and protect the human rights of people living with mental illness.

Using the exhibition as a context to reflect on local incidents such as the Life Esidimeni tragedy, the program is hosted in collaboration with the South African Society of Psychiatrists and the German Association for Psychiatry, Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics (DGPPN) together with local advocacy groups (SADAG, SAFMH, SECTION27, RHAP) and university affiliated ethics centers.

Professor Martin Veller, Dean of the WITS Faculty of Health Sciences opened the Johannesburg events, saying that many of the recent South African incidents of human rights violations and other irregularities points towards a trend of those that spoke out were not heard due to the fact that they did not have enough political connectivity.

“Civil society should be involved in such concerns yet even during the current implementation of and meeting of objectives to offer a fair and equitable health system, political connectivity seems to be the driver. In the Life Esidimeni incident and others, health care workers had to face political interference and manipulation from political principals.”

Referring to the moral pathology and ethical crisis of the Life Esidimeni tragedy, Professor Ames Dhali, Director of the WITS Steve Biko Centre for Bio-ethics said that when a conflict of dual loyalties develops between professionals’ relationship with patients and their relationship with an employer, health professionals should maintain undivided loyalty to the welfare of patients.

“The Life Esidemeni tragedy has raised a number of ethical issues at various levels ranging from human rights violations to the moral authority of codes and professional oaths, to loyalty conflicts and the different ethical dimensions of health care practice.”

“Justice Dikgang Moseneke, one of the keynote speakers pointed out that when decision makers do not accept accountability activism is needed over and above having blue prints in the form of good policy and constitutional documents in place. He rightly said that if professional organisations make their voice heard they should sometimes resort to unorthodox methods to sound the alarm.”

Professor Dhai concluded: “As healthcare professionals we should be natural advocates of our patients. For the ill, treatment is a matter of life and death, yet the daily struggle is about the access to healthcare, which too is a matter of life and death. Advocacy will keep the government officials and politicians accountable for the accessibility and quality of care delivered to patients.”

The exhibition will run at the WITS Faculty of Health Sciences’ Adler Museum until 24 August when the program will continue in Pretoria from 3 to 24 September before moving on to Durban (8 October to 30 November) and Cape Town (14 January to 28 February 2018)

NOTES TO EDITORS

The South African Society of Psychiatrists (SASOP), in partnership with: the German Association for Psychiatry, Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics (DGPPN); local advocacy groups such as South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG), the South African federation of Mental Health (SAFMH), SECTION27, the Rural Health Advocacy Project (RHAP); as well as the University of the Witwatersrand’s (WITS) Adler Museum and Steve Biko Centre for Bioethics (SBCB); and the University of Pretoria’s (UP) Centre for Ethics and Philosophy of Health Sciences, has recently embarked on a program **“Human Rights for People with Mental Illness”**. The program consists of discussions and presentations in different cities - Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town, as well as the travelling exhibition of the DGPPN, entitled **“Registered, Persecuted, Annihilated - The Sick and the Disabled under National Socialism”**.

SCHEDULE: SASOP PROGRAM on HUMAN RIGHTS for PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

GAUTENG LECTURE PROGRAMME

9 July to 24 August 2018 DGPPN Exhibition WITS Faculty of Health Sciences Adler Museum

6 August 2018 16h30 for 17h00-19h00 Johannesburg Holocaust Centre - Human Rights for People with Mental Illness

Chair – Prof Bernard J/van Rensburg (SASOP)

- 17h10-17h40 **“Life Esidimeni tragedy: Moral pathology and an ethical crisis.”** - Prof Ames Dhali, Director WITS Steve Biko Centre for Bioethics
- 17h40-18h10 **“Ethical strategies to prevent domination in healthcare”** - Prof Werdie van Staden, Director UP Centre for Ethics and Philosophy of Health Sciences
- 18h10-18h40 **“Protecting the human rights of patients”** - Prof Bernard Jane van Rensburg, SASOP President, WITS Department of Psychiatry

6th September 2018 16h00-18h30 University of Pretoria (venue TBC) – SASOP Program on “Human Rights for People with Mental Illness”

- 16h50-17h00 **Opening of DGPPN Exhibition** - Prof Tiaan de Jager, Dean UP Faculty of Health Sciences
- 17h00-17h30 **“Is a battle the best option for ensuring human rights in mental healthcare?”** - Prof Werdie van Staden, Director UP Centre for Ethics and Philosophy of Health Sciences
- 17h30-18h00 **“Biolegitimacy: Valuation, Evaluation, Devaluation of Life”** - Prof Ulrike Kistner, Professor of Philosophy, UP

12 September 2018 16h00-19h15 University of Pretoria (venue TBC)

– SASOP Lecture and Panel Discussion on the Life Esidimeni experience: SASOP and Advocacy Partners (SADAG, SAFMH, SECTION27) Chair – TBC

- 17h00-17h30 **“Human Rights for People with Mental Illness: The Life Esidimeni tragedy as a violation of international law.”** - Prof Annelize Nienaber, Head UP Department of Public Law
- 17h30-18h45 **“Presentations. 10-15 minute by panel members** - Dr Mvuyiso Talatala, Ms Cassey Chambers, Dr Lesley Robertson, Ms Sasha Stevenson, Ms Bharti Patel

21-24 September 2018, CSIR Conference Centre: SASOP Congress

- Sunday 23 September 15h00- 15h30 Key-note speaker **“Psychiatry during National Socialism: Lessons in advocacy and reconciliation.”** - Prof Frank Schneider, Director Clinic for Psychiatry, Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics, University of Aachen, Germany

26 September 2017, 19h00-20h00 Johannesburg Holocaust Centre - Human Rights for People with Mental Illness

- 17h10-17h45 **“Psychiatry during National Socialism: Lessons in advocacy reconciliation”** - Prof Frank Schneider Director Clinic for Psychiatry, Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics, University of Aachen, Germany

DATES FOR THE VARIOUS CITIES

Until 24 August 2018	Johannesburg <ul style="list-style-type: none">• WITS Faculty of Health Sciences, Adler Museum
3 to 24 September 2018	Pretoria <ul style="list-style-type: none">• University of Pretoria - Venue TBC (3-20 Sep)• CSIR Conference Centre (21-24 Sep, SASOP Congress)
8 October to 30 November 2018	Durban <ul style="list-style-type: none">• UKZN Faculty of Health Sciences (TBC)
14 January to 28 Feb 2019	Cape Town <ul style="list-style-type: none">• UCT Faculty of Health Sciences and SU Faculty of Health Sciences (TBC)