

CEO'S REPORT TO AGM 2022

Dear members of the AGM.

Reflection

Earlier in this year, the President officially announced the end to the state of disaster related to the Coronavirus Pandemic. This, after 750 days of various restrictions designed to protect lives and enable an informed and decisive approach to the pandemic. For 750 days we have had to observe various regulations, including the wearing of masks, sanitizing and the practice of social distance. In some ways the words of the song ring true (I only know of Bete Midler singing this).

The song speaks of how things look from a distance. How the world looks at peace and that there is harmony among people. How, from a distance there is peace, and the world is beautiful. How God watches from a distance.

This song, as beautiful as it is, represents everything that Palliative Care is not.

Palliative care and the work of Msunduzi Hospice is about being present, about being among the trouble and the distress, and pain of lives lived in illness.

Another song, made famous by Joan Osbourne, asks a different question. A question that can be addressed by the work of Palliative care. "What if God was one of us. Just a slob like one of us. Just a stranger on the bus. Trying to make his way home."

We, at Msunduzi Hospice, reach out to the distressed, the stressed, those in pain, those who are trying to make a life for themselves while suffering a particular (or combination of) illness. Just like one of us. Just like all of us. They are all around us. Palliative Care is for all, without limitation. The limits are a matter of resources not functionality or philosophy.

For 750 days we have had to make plans to touch the lives of our patients when we were supposed to practice social distance. I am very proud of the care team in their achievements during 2021. Caring for approximately 275 Patients per months along with 308 Family members (only 438 unique patients). Providing 66582 direct interventions through 16388 visits (including telephone calls, WhatsApp message etc.). They have risen to the challenge in reaching out to the patient and their family among us. Those who are among us. Sheila and her team are to be congratulated for this.

There have been additional challenges and we are currently in a process of trying to recruit additional care staff.

During the course of 2021, Vijaya Chetty (Income Generation Manager) died due to Covid related complications. Alongside the emotional pain and shock for the organisation, this left a huge productivity hole in the organisation. Vijaya will be missed in many ways, and we have spoken about these at various memorial gatherings. She will also leave a gap in the running of her department. She rose to the challenges placed on the organisation through the Covid pandemic and managed to keep a positive and hopeful attitude in all that she did. Msunduzi Hospice has not replaced her but has shared the workload out among a number of team members.

Janine Venter also died in 2021 after a struggle with Cancer over a number of years. Janie was a person who was dedicated and focused on her job and the targets that were set for her. She raised millions of Rands for the organisation over many years. She had recently been medically boarded before her death and she too will be missed.

Needless to say, the income during 2021 was less than optimal. However, as the numbers will show it was not all that bad. Our gross income for 2021 was R8,261,661.00 As per usual proposal income and donations in general made up 51% of our income (56% in 2020 and 46% in 2019). This is a pleasing outcome but does highlight our dependence on proposal income. Our retail and events made up 32% of our income (32% in 2020 and 45% in 2019). The decrease is worrying but shows the difficulty of retail income at the moment. This is one number that needs our attention in the year ahead. An additional slide will explain this more clearly.

A note must be made of the exceptionally high value assigned to sundry income. The figure in 2021 includes income from sale of investment (R580,000.00) and a large amount from insurance related to a claim late in 2020 from a hail damage. There was also a claim in December of 2021.

Looking forward

Looking back, 2021 has been a difficult year. A year of some achievement but a year of sadness as well. When we look forward, I am not filled with great confidence and optimism.

2022 has started off very bleakly with an unjustifiable/criminal invasion of the Ukraine by Russia, two devastating floods in KZN and in particular along the coast, and more suspicions of corruption on the part of our government. However, this bleak picture, gives a framework in which to try and pitch our care and our events.

The image of Dr Imtiaz Sooliman as a hero and the Gift of the Givers reaching out to needy people in Durban and Khyber shows what can be done. Millions of rands (cash and kind) have poured into this foundation. How do they get it right? This speaks to our marketing and how we sell the services that we offer.

For too long, we have played the role of the poor relative. Humbly begging to ensure our existence. This should stop. We should be marketing ourselves, our services, and the value that we add to the journey of 270 patients each month (and their families). How we come alongside and help people, families, individuals develop and maintain some significance of a quality of life. We should be proud of this; we should be trumpeting each and every small victory in our patients lives as loudly as we can. When a parent discloses their HIV status to their child. When a young man is able to confidently and unashamedly approach a clinic for his ARV's. When a woman who has had a mastectomy can proudly talk about the change in her body, her sex life, her life. These are all victories. But we hide them, we don't boast about them. This is what we should be talking about, as often and in as many different ways as possible. Who will tell our story and the story of our patients if not ourselves? This is the future that we should be embracing.

It is appropriate here to talk about sustainability. Too often when we speak about sustainability we speak about finances. Finances play a very important role in any sustainability plan of any organisation. However, sustainability is more than financial. Msunduzi Hospice has an approach to sustainability that rests on three pillars.

1 – Income generation and transparent financial management:

The organisation has a good financial team that is headed by a treasurer and supported by members of the board as well as a finance manager and team. The income generation programme is multifaceted, including a second-hand retail section, events and functions section and a proposal/grant writing section. The value of annual financial audits cannot be overstated, and these form a very important aspect of ensuring transparency and control of financial matters within the organisation. The Finance Committee meets on a regular basis to consider monthly management accounts and to respond to issues in a timely fashion.

2 – Quality service delivery:

The organisation prides itself in delivering Quality Home-Based Hospice and Palliative Care services to the wider community of Pietermaritzburg and surrounding areas. This quality care is recognised through accreditation by Cohsasa, one of only 8 Hospices country wide to have this status (<https://cohsasa.co.za/health-quality-improvement-south-africa/>). Our next assessment by Cohsasa will take place in June 2022.

3 – Community support and engagement:

The organisation relies on the support of the community to achieve both its service delivery objectives as well as its income generation objectives. Without the support of the local community, none of the local activities would be possible. The support of the wider community is enhanced through our accreditation status as well as through our annual financial audits. A comprehensive marketing programme is something new for the organisation in 2022 and this will be evident in our various social media and related campaigns.

Playing on the larger field:

I play many roles both here in KwaZulu-Natal as well as on behalf of the national office of HPCA. One of those roles is to chair and champion the accreditation process. Cohsasa will be assessing Msunduzi Hospice in June. In this capacity I am very aware of the pivotal role Hospices have played in making Palliative Care known and understood in the community as a whole. Yes, there remain some misunderstandings, and we are working very hard to correct these. But did you know that HPCA is the only NGO in the country to operate care givers in all 9 provinces? Did you know that Hospices (those who participate) are the only externally accredited NGO in the country. Our health care services are accredited by the same organisation that accredits most private hospitals in South Africa and elsewhere in Africa, against a set of standards recognised internationally. This is something we should be proud of and work hard to achieve and maintain. Yet we remain silent. We remain the bird in the bush instead of the eagle soaring through the skies.

While events and fund raising will always remain a key element of our public profile, we must work on improving the public image of Hospice on a wider platform and for a wider audience. Tanya is working hard at this but will need your help. We must persuade our patients and their families to speak widely about the care they receive at our hands and to encourage their friends and families to support us and to turn to us for assistance.

By way of conclusion

The theme for Hospice week this year is 'Live before dying.' The intent is to dispel the myths of Hospice and Palliative Care. For too long we have sold ourselves as providing care to the dying. At one level, this is true. However, more importantly is that we enable, help, and encourage people to live until they die. This is a far more important message as it speaks to hope, and it speaks to a future. Yes, helping people to die is a noble and a necessary cause. Of far greater value is to help people to live. Far too often, in the case of serious illness, people give up. We see this in ourselves, we see it in our families, we see it portrayed in the movies. We see it all around. There is no hope. The message that is given out is that you should go home and die. Call your family to say good bye.

Far more challenging and far more important is a different message. How can we make these few remaining hours, days, weeks, months, years of great value to you? How can we help you to live? How can we help you to find meaning in what you are going through at this moment? These are the stories that should be told. Told loud. Told clear. I draw your attention to our recent series of Facebook posts and related videos that were highly successful during Hospice week this year. Please go to our Facebook page and view these.

At the start of this address, I reflected on the distance that we have had to maintain for 750 days. Call this social distance, call it what you like, it has been and will always remain an artificial imposition on our lives which is completely necessary, but entirely un-natural. We can now go back (albeit with caution) to what is more normal and more natural. We can BE with one another. We can journey together in solidarity towards that place that offers meaning. We journey through our experiences, growing through our suffering, our pain our shared existence. Some find meaning at journeys end, in a life well lived and shared. In heaven seated with God, for some, in returning to journey again and learn new things for others. For myself, in the journey itself and the assimilation into cosmic unity. Indeed, God is one of us. God is all of us. God is us and we are God.