

# LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE 2017 NURSING CONFERENCE

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The Nursing Conference was held on 9 June 2017 as part of the Africa Health Exhibition and Congress organised by Informa Life Sciences Exhibitions. The conference was held at the Gallagher Convention Centre, Midrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. The registration fees of the conference will be donated to the Academy of Nursing South Africa (ANSA). The attendees included nurses and nursing students from all over Africa.

The theme of the conference was “A paradigm shift in specialist nursing”. The objectives of the conference were to discuss the regulatory changes which influence specialist nursing and advances in the field, to assess the state of specialist nursing in various African countries, to compare staffing norms in specialist units and identify the best approaches, and to form a platform to debate nursing challenges in relation to medico-legal incidents and how to avoid them. Prof. Sarie Human, who is the Chairperson of the Laws and Practice Committee at the South African Nursing Council (SANC), and Mr F Smith, who is the Nursing Operations Manager at Life Healthcare Group, gave the opening remarks at the conference.

The conference was divided into four sessions. Session 1 was titled the “Specialist nursing landscape in Africa” and it was moderated by Mr F. Smith. In this session the focus was on the meaning of specialist nursing, what it entails, and how different nursing education institutions developed different specialist nursing programmes in Africa. The first speaker was Prof. N. A. Sukati who is the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Swaziland. Prof. Sukati spoke about the “Competencies and education of specialist nurses in Swaziland”. Dr Lydia Aziato, who is a senior lecturer and head of the Department of Adult Health in the School of Nursing at the University of Ghana, spoke about “The trajectory of specialist nurses’ development in Ghana”. The last speaker of the session was Dr E. Chirwa whose speech was titled “Specialist nurses’ landscape in Malawi”. Dr Chirwa is the Vice President of the International Federation of Midwives, and the Vice Chancellor of the Malawi University of Science and Technology.

The second session was moderated by Prof S. Human. The focus of this session was on medico-legal incidents. In this session, there was a panel discussion on “Nursing challenges with medico-legal incidents”. The panellists of the session were Mrs A. Hayward, a lecturer in nursing at the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS), Dr A. D. du Plessis, an independent midwifery consultant and researcher, and Ms L. Fletcher, a mediator for Life Healthcare. All the panellists were from South Africa.

Session three focused on specialist nursing education and it was moderated by Mr F Smith. Prof S. Human opened the session by giving a presentation about the “State of specialist nursing in South Africa”. This was followed by a panel discussion. Each panellist gave a short presentation before the discussion. The panellists were Prof A. J. Pienaar, the Acting Director of School of Nursing Science (SONS) at the North-West University (Mafikeng campus) and the chairperson of the Education Committee of the South African Nursing Council, Dr N. Geyer, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Nursing Education Association (NEA), and Mr T. Vermaak, the manager of the Netcare Education Faculty of Nursing and Ancillary Healthcare. All the panellists of this session were from South Africa.

The fourth session was moderated by Prof. S. Human. This last session was a panel discussion on “Staffing norms in specialist units”. The panellists of the session were Ms J. Dzebu, the unit manager of the Gynaecology Unit in the Charlotte Maxeke Hospital, Ms L. Young, the Managing Executive of Charisma Nursing Agency, and Ms L. Balfour, the unit manager of the Intensive Care Unit at Life Healthcare in Johannesburg. All the panellists were from South Africa.

The lessons learned at the conference are the following:

- A specialist nursing programme should be aligned with the unique needs of South Africa, and should provide planning, development and implementation. For this programme, liaison with the department responsible for health will be vital.

- International and national collaborations are important to start and provide the specialist nursing programme.
- The specialist nurses need to take leadership and make their speciality recognised.
- There is a need for mechanisms to keep nursing specialists in practice to provide specialised nursing care, which is a challenge in numerous African countries at the moment.

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