

Editorial

How do we prepare for uncertainties?



It is more than a year ago that we were confronted by the unknown scenario of a virulent virus spreading in a way that we did not expect. Fear, anxiety, indifference, recklessness were only a few reactions shown amongst the general public and healthcare workers. We had to prepare for the unknown, and we only had past experiences and information from affected countries to rely on.

Our country had to take the lead locally and in the southern African countries as we recorded the first known COVID-19 case. Measures taken in South Africa were carefully and intensely studied and monitored by our neighbouring countries because of the effect of similar weather conditions and resources. We made mistakes, saved lives, implemented highly successful treatment regimes, and participated actively in testing several of the vaccines.

The future might have a third COVID-19 wave or perhaps a new pandemic from an unknown origin; how can we be ready? Are we going to be caught off guard, or will we be better prepared for the unanticipated?

To be prepared for the unanticipated, it is essential to use evidence-based practices to develop strategies to strengthen healthcare capacities. We must ensure that we can respond to the unexpected in appropriate ways. Our experiences taught us to be open and receptive to new thoughts and practices to address dire situations. Lessons learnt during the first two waves must be studied and analysed to ensure that the following is in place for future interventions:

- Effective and informed screening of all international travellers at their port of entry
- The importance of including local and international travel history as part of the patient history

- An effective reporting system that is understood and applied by all citizens
- Training healthcare professionals to understand infection prevention and control
 - Importance of fresh air and motivating people to spend time in the open
 - The availability of clean water for hand hygiene
 - Well managed waste removal and treatment systems
- Realistic and practical measures to manage crowds:
 - limit the numbers attending gatherings,
 - implement similar strategies for all public areas such as shops, religious gatherings, and relaxation gatherings, and
 - limit strategies that will result in job losses.
- The importance of the general health of the population must be emphasised, and access to healthcare services must not be restricted. Do not overcompensate as the long-term effects of not receiving timely treatment place an unnecessary burden on the healthcare system
- The importance of retaining jobs at all levels to prevent the indirect consequences of poverty and hunger
- Sufficient staffing levels (nurses, carers) to provide 24-hour basic care
 - Observation and care of patients during day and night shifts
 - Improved oxygen supply to all healthcare facilities

Nurse leaders must now, more than ever before, gather and interpret the new knowledge, communicate and engage with leaders in the private and public sectors to share lessons learned to lessen the toll of future outbreaks. It is also time to embrace the positives from the pandemic—the collaboration among researchers, clinicians, statisticians, and engineers were key in the successful development of vaccines, the skilful upgrade of equipment to provide in the desperate need for ventilators and the implementation of effective infection prevention and control measures.

The nurse's vital role was again demonstrated, and it is great to be part of such a dedicated and committed nursing fraternity.

Thank you to all our nurses; 2020 was proven to be the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife!

Annelie Meiring