

World Family Doctor Day, 19 May 2021: “Building the future with family doctors”

World Family Doctor Day (WFDD) was first declared by the World Organisation of Family Doctors (WONCA) in 2010 and it has become a day to highlight the role and contribution of family doctors and primary care teams in healthcare systems around the world. This celebration is the perfect opportunity to acknowledge the central role of family doctors in the delivery of personal, comprehensive and continuing health care for all patients. It is also a chance to celebrate the progress being made in family medicine and the special contributions of primary care teams globally.

The theme of this year’s World Family Doctor Day, “Building the future with family doctors”.¹ WONCA describes the 2021 WFDD theme from a global perspective: “We have available to us plenty of robust research; we have access to innovations in telemedicine and artificial intelligence, we share experiences of delivering good quality primary care (most especially during the huge challenge posed by the pandemic); and we have enthusiasm for our profession in abundance. Let us show our clinical and health planning colleagues, as well as our politicians, that building the future with family doctors is the right approach, at the right time, to achieve our shared goal of comprehensive patient-centred health services. World Family Doctor Day, on 19th May, is an opportunity to come together as family doctors around the world and consolidate our call for global commitment to delivery of that comprehensive patient-centred health care to each and every person we serve.”¹

But what does this theme represent for our local context? In our conversations with our Metro District Health Services partner, the benefits of family physicians are realised when there are enabled to fully occupy their roles at District Hospital or PHC levels. These roles may be grouped into three areas: clinician/consultant; clinical trainer/capacity builder; and leader/clinical governance champion. The following local contributions by family doctors may be recognised and celebrated as part of WFDD 2021:

- *Care coordination across levels and disciplines*

In the Cape Town metropole as well as in the rural districts of the Western Cape (especially the Saldanha Bay sub-district as well as Garden Route district), family doctors and postgraduate students affiliated with the Division of Family Medicine of the University of Cape Town are exerting their leadership abilities across all their roles.² Family doctors’ ability to influence their context is reliant on functional clinical teams (include doctors, nurses, community health workers and rehabilitation workers) to enable interdisciplinary collaboration. Family doctors, including those focusing on palliative care, help ensure that patients’ healthcare

needs are coordinated across levels of care in the health system, to ensure appropriate and efficient use of resources.³

- *Family-, team- and community-oriented approaches*

Family doctors are working in various aspects of the South African private as well as district health systems (district hospitals, primary care facilities and community-based teams). The past year has demonstrated the involvement of family doctors in the COVID-19 response.^{4,5,6} A team of Cape Town-based Community Health Centre (CHC) doctors ensured that the health-service redesign during COVID-19 did not disrupt the family medicine internship programme, by designing an innovative tool that facilitated ongoing supervision of the interns.⁷ Public health and family doctors have worked together to coordinate community orientated interventions. South Africa envisages a community-oriented approach to primary health care. Family doctors have important roles to play in leading, implementing, supporting and maintaining community-orientated primary care (COPC).^{6,8}

- *Academic primary care scholarly contributions*

Research remains one of the key strategies to advance our discipline. More high-quality research is needed to help advocate for the contribution of family medicine and primary care, including palliative care. At the University of Cape Town, the Division of Family Medicine is involved in multidisciplinary community-based teaching and learning with a strong focus on primary care research. Our division's research output during 2020 included research related to clinical care, health services and systems,⁹⁻¹³ as well as educational research.¹⁴⁻¹⁷ Several of the research outputs relate to the COVID-19 pandemic response. One of our colleagues, A/Prof Mosedi Namane, has been selected as a Lancet commissioner on Primary Care Osteoarthritis from 2020 to 2022.¹⁸ During our research review workshop in October 2020, we discussed ways to build our research footprint centred around family medicine and palliative care research (see Figure 1).

During a strategic visioning exercise in November 2020, we agreed on the strategic goal for our Division: *we will strive to contribute to the body of knowledge that improves individual and community health holistically, builds the academic disciplines of primary and palliative care, and produces educational, clinical and research practitioners who are both locally and internationally recognised for their work.* Our Division's relationship-based teaching strategy coupled with a socially relevant research agenda aims to ensure a closer alignment with the health priorities of our communities. The presence of generalist primary care faculty in core teaching has been shown to influence career choices of medical students and young doctors, and enhance the status of generalism.¹⁹ As we celebrate World Family Doctor Day, let us continue with our

efforts to build the scholarly basis of our discipline, by investing in the relationships with our patients, students, colleagues, teams and communities.

For more information, please visit: http://www.publichealth.uct.ac.za/phfm_family-medicine, or contact: A/Prof Klaus von Pressentin, Head: Division of Family Medicine, University of Cape Town: klaus.vonpressentin@uct.ac.za.



Figure 1: Members of the Division of Family Medicine during their research strategy workshop in October 2020.

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