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**PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE SOCIETY OF NEUROSURGEONS OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**Friday 7 August 2015**

**The Boardwalk Conference Centre, Port Elizabeth**

**In Memoriam:**

The Society has lost two of its most eminent members over the past year. Prof MJ van Rensburg, previous Head of the Department of Neurosurgery at the University of Pretoria, passed away after devoting most of his life to neurosurgery. He had been involved in registrar training up until approximately 3 months before he passed away at the age of 86 years. He was granted life membership of the Society in 2004.

Dr P Repko was one of the first neurosurgeons in the country. He had provided a neurosurgery and neurology service to the central part of the country since the early years of neurosurgery. He has remained active in neurosurgery and medico-legal reporting until a few weeks before he passed away.

Dr G Coetzee's untimely death has been a great shock for all of us. He has been an active member of the Neurosurgery Society and become president of the South African Spine Society in March 2015. His sense of humour and enthusiasm will be missed. Exco has proposed to name the prize for the best scientific paper presented by a registrar or junior consultant after him and this will be put to the vote.

### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

Eleven new neurosurgeons have qualified over the past year. We welcome them in our midst and wish them all the best for the future.

A number of workshops and subspecialty congresses have been held over the past year. We thank the organisers, the academic departments and the trade for their contributions.

Prof Allan Taylor has put in a lot of effort to establish new tariff codes for intracranial surgery to bring it on par with the spinal surgery codes. Prof Taylor has presented new codes based on the CPT 4 coding system which cover most intracranial procedures and new technologies to a combined meeting of SAMA, SAPPF and BHF. Hopefully this will be implemented in 2016.

The SNSA has put in a bid to host the International WFNS Congress in Cape Town in 2021. Prof Fieggen will provide more information.

Prof Fieggen has been elected president of the Continental Association of African neurosurgeons which is a milestone as this is the first African Society of Neurosurgeons which represents all the countries in Africa where neurosurgery is practised. He was also instrumental in obtaining permission from the AANS to adopt their code of ethics for use by the SNSA.

### **REASONS FOR CONCERN:**

#### **Medical Litigation:**

Medical litigation has remained a reason for concern. One gets the impression that there has been a decline in the number of claims but unfortunately, a single claim with a large quantum has a significant effect on our subscriptions due to our small numbers. The Law Reform Commission is currently looking into the matter of medical malpractice claims in the country and there is a possibility that legislation could change in future, but unfortunately this will take time.

#### **Private Healthcare Inquiry:**

As you know, this could have a significant impact on private healthcare in the country in future. The SNSA is represented by the SAPPF who has submitted a comprehensive overview of the role that private healthcare plays in the country. The SNSA receives feedback from SAPPF on a regular basis with regard to the progress of the

investigation. Our major concern is the possibility that the commission could reintroduce a reference price list which could fix our tariffs. This could force all neurosurgeons to charge the same rates.

Difficulties at academic training centres:

Some centres more than others, are burdened by a lack of funds and infrastructure and an overload of clinical work, especially trauma cases. Discussions between the heads of the department and the provincial stake holders have taken place.

**HEALTHMAN:**

Each member of SNSA pays a significant amount for membership. Members are encouraged to fully utilise their services, especially when there are problems with the funders.

**EXCO ACTIVITIES:**

Members of Exco represent SNSA at SAPPF and FOSAS (Federation of South African Surgical Specialities) meetings. Exco had a meeting with Dr J Tiernan of MPS in November 2014 with regard to the increase in our subscription fees. Unfortunately, there is not much that MPS can do about it as we were informed that their actuaries calculate our subscriptions based on the claim history of the group.

SNSA has again supported the WFNS Paediatric Neurosurgery course that was held this year in Cape Town.

Members of Exco are often requested to liaise with medical advisors of medical aids about billing for procedures and neurosurgeons' accounts are sometimes referred to Exco for comment. Members are requested to individualise each account. We should be able to motivate for every code that is charged for Unbundling of codes, especially for spinal surgery is not recommended.

**FINANCES:**

The Society's finances are healthy at the moment, thanks to the great effort of the congress chairmen and Hendrika van der Merwe who have organised the last few congresses. The 2014 congress in Pretoria showed a profit of R570 000. It is important for the Society to have significant reserves as we are uncertain whether the trade will still be allowed to sponsor future congresses, depending on the recommendations of the Healthcare Inquiry Commission.

### **MEMBERSHIP:**

Our numbers have increased significantly. Approximately 110 neurosurgeons are members of the Society. Approximately 160 neurosurgeons are registered at the HPCSA, but not all of them are still practising actively and are still in the country. Membership provides more bargaining power and interaction between colleagues. Members are encouraged to take part in Society activities and become members of committees. Another benefit of membership is to receive **Surgical Neurology International** electronically every month. Those members who do not receive the journal should contact Dr I Vlok.

### **CAANS:**

Prof G Fieggen and Dr M du Treu represent our Society at CAANS. A combined meeting with CAANS, the CNS (Congress of Neurosurgeons in the USA) is planned to take place in Cape Town in 2016. This will replace the annual SNSA congress.

### **WEBSITE:**

Our website is slowly coming off the ground. Members should please check their contact details and inform Dr Vlok if any corrections need to be made. We are busy establishing a secure section and log-in details will be e-mailed to members. A secure section will deal with matters that are of importance to members only.

### **INDEMNITY INSURANCE:**

At the meeting with MPS in November 2014 we gained the impression that MPS was of the opinion that South Africa is coming on par with other countries in the world, especially Ireland with regard to the increase in our indemnity insurance subscription rates. The worldwide norm of indemnity insurance is reportedly between 6-7% of a private neurosurgeon's annual turnover. This is yet another reason why NHRPL fees are unrealistic. Members in full time academic employment who perform RWOPS have been particularly hard hit with their premiums as they are expected to pay the same premiums as those in private practice if their annual income from RWOPS is more than R240 000. Prof Fieggen and Dr Thompson have corresponded with MPS a number of times but no positive feedback has been received to date.

### **RAF AMENDMENT BILL:**

The SNSA supports the objections that have been lodged by the South African Orthopaedic Association against the proposed bill. The Society has also contributed financially to their effort. Should the amendment bill be approved by parliament, this could have a far reaching effect on accident victims, doctors and lawyers as road accident victims will be managed in the same manner as injury-on-duty patients. Victims would have to negotiate

personally with the RAF to confer about settlement of their claims. This is an attempt by the RAF to reduce legal costs which amount to billions of rands.

**2016 CONGRESS:**

This will take place in Cape Town and will be a combined meeting with CAANS and the CNS.

**BID FOR THE 2021 WFNS INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS:**

The Society has put in a bid to host the 2021 WFNS International Congress in Cape Town. We are not optimistic that it will be successful but it should give us a better chance for a successful bid for 2025. Expenses to date have been minimal and I was reassured by Prof Fieggen that this does not carry a financial risk for the Society.

**THE WAY FORWARD:**

We will attempt to further increase our membership numbers, support subspeciality training and accreditation, maintain high ethical standards and cooperate with other societies. We will ensure that patient care remains the top priority of our Society.

**JACQUES DU PLESSIS**

**President**