Living their passion for upliftment – RuDASA award winners

From celebrating the work of a rare rural audiologist to lauding the selfless lifetime achievements of a veteran community change-agent, the Rural Doctors’ Association of South Africa (RuDASA) awards at its 20th annual conference in Grahamstown on 8 August showcased vocation-driven talent.

A near-gold-standard audiology service set up over the past 3 years at the remote but historically award-winning Eastern Cape Zithulele Hospital won the Rural Rehabilitation Worker of the Year for University of KwaZulu-Natal audiology graduate Lineo Lecheko. Enhancing Zithulele’s multidisciplinary approach, Lecheko’s screening of multidrug-resistant tuberculosis patients has led to vastly improved local hearing outcomes. Patients newly fitted with hearing aids (rare in rural areas) regularly travel long distances just to bring homegrown gifts to thank her for helping transform their worlds. Her initial impact drew the attention of the provincial treasury, which boosted her work with more than ZAR1 million of audiology equipment and facilitated the placement of an audiology community service assistant.

Epitomising knowledge-to-practice

RuDASA’s Rural Doctor of the Year for 2016 was Dr Nomlindo Makubalo, who started out by winning a bursary to add an MB ChB degree to her medical technology diploma before qualifying and gaining experience in paediatrics, genetics and advanced health management. As the Eastern Cape’s District Clinical Specialist Team leader, she co-ordinates child healthcare and collegial training. The citation lauds her major contribution to Child Programme Improvement Plans (PIP), the procurement of critical hospital equipment and high-care beds, new neonatal units in district hospitals, HIV-positive patient tracing, and establishing vital protocols such as the Helping Babies Breathe, Management of Small and Sick

To their own communities. Together with his equally tireless wife Rachel, he continually hosts destitute and homeless local children in the wooden home they built, and has sponsored the living expenses and school/university fees of countless others over the years. Accepting the award on his behalf, Mseleni senior medical officer Dr Kobus Viljoen said the Fredlund household overnight was a mix of foreign students, volunteers and children – often with Fredlund entertaining them on his trusty guitar. A fearless surgeon with a penchant for cardiology, he had conducted ‘every ectomy and otomy in the book,’ and regularly did hernia repairs, hysterecomies and total hip replacements, while his clinical brag list included three full-term extrauterine deliveries (incidence 1 in 30 000). He summed up Fredlund by quoting former US president, Harry Truman: ‘It’s amazing what you can accomplish if you don’t mind who gets the credit.’

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The Rural Nurse of the Year award went to Sister Charlotte Stemmet, whose versatile mobile clinic design went into production in the Western Cape recently, while Prince Maletje Maleka won the Clinical Associate of the Year award for his ‘Street Medicine’ project in Tshwane.

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