



MMPA hosts successful 21st Annual Congress at Sun City

The Mine Medical Professionals Association (MMPA), in conjunction with Mine Health and Safety Council (MHSC), recently held their 21st Annual Congress at the beautiful Sun City Resort. The event was held over two days on the 26th and 27th of October. It was well attended by medical professionals from the mining industry, who came to deliberate on some of the burning and relevant issues in the medical field.

Of note was the first session which covered, in detail, the problem of mental health and the vulnerability of doctors to stress and depression.

Following the event, we interviewed the MMPA President, Dr Nothando Moyo-Mubayiwa, who is the Superintendent for Occupational Health and Wellness at Anglo American Kumba Iron Ore, Sishen Mine. She gave us her impression of the event, with some key take-home messages.

Who was invited to this congress?

"We had participants from all disciplines attending. They ranged from occupational medical practitioners (OMPs), occupational health practitioners (OHPs), occupational therapists, medical practitioners in mining; researchers, subject-matter experts in mental health, and occupational hygiene experts; to the Masoyise iTB Team, health economists and actuarial scientists and experts on National Health Insurance, and the MHSC research teams."

What were the highlights of the event?

"The session on mental health was the highlight of the Congress. The Mental Health Session and the Gala Dinner Keynote Speaker, Patience Magwenzi, gave us a lot to think about regarding change management and how we deal with people as we impose new changes, be it a new diagnosis or work changes such as restructuring. The issue of mental health is very topical in South Africa currently, following the suicides of some celebrities in recent times.

The discussion on National Health Insurance also served to show us how universal health coverage will work in the South African context. It became very clear that a South African solution has to be developed, taking the current systems and legacy issues into account. Many speakers delivered various topics with eloquence, and we gained a lot of insight from each topic."

Your theme was the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Why did you choose that theme?

"Doctors need to get ahead of the game and use all technology possible to be proactive in the prevention of diseases and injuries. Many people are very nervous and apprehensive about artificial intelligence. However, if we know about it and we understand its advantages and limitations, we can lead from the front."



Front: Dr Muofhe Murwamphinda, MMPA Vice President, with Congress delegates

Photograph: Mbalenhle Buthelezi, MMPA Secretary

What is the impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution on health?

"The dawn of the Fourth Industrial Revolution promises to bring many challenges from a staff perspective in the workplace. We already see the impact of an always-on, never shut-down social media kind of life on society. As we start to prepare for the wide-scale deployment of artificial intelligence and its day-to-day integration in the workplace, we need to look at our preparedness as health professionals. Are our companies ready? Have we put the right controls in place to ensure that the risks are adequate and proactively managed? Are people prepared for the mental and psychological impacts that could result from artificial intelligence in the workplace? The MMPA Annual Congress brought these and other questions to the fore. The timing of the event was perfect as it dealt with some of these questions and provided the delegates with much food for thought."

What were the significant insights from the Annual Congress?

"One of the conclusions which came out of the Annual Congress is that we are missing something with our current approach to health provision in the sector. Occupational health and mental health are not prioritised in the current health framework. When one looks at society in general, there is still a stigma around mental health, and more so among health professionals themselves. The Congress highlighted this, and also the need from health professionals themselves to focus more on their mental health as well as that of the public. Plans are already underway for next year's Congress. The Congress is growing in stature every year and has become a must-attend event for medical professionals in the mining sector and beyond."

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