

A Community Podiatry Visit to Bophuthatswana

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The need for a podiatric service to rural areas was one of the issues addressed on 27th August 1993 at a gathering of community health nurses and volunteers at the Molaledi Dam in Bophuthatswana some 300 km from Johannesburg. The event was a maternal and child health day for the Madikwe region.

Background information

The Madikwe region extends from approximately 50 km from Rustenburg to the Botswana border and covers hundreds of square kilometres. The region comprises 36 villages with a total population of 67 000. The majority of the villages are serviced with community clinics run by nurses and Care Groups (volunteers from the community). Two hospitals i.e. the Derdepoort and Moretelelesi Hospitals see to the needs of the critically ill. The village clinics are visited on average once every fortnight by a general practitioner. The clinics offer vaccination and maternity services as well as screening patients for diseases.

Residents of the region are dependent on agriculture and a large number of the males work in urban areas and mines and only return on weekends to visit their families.

Podiatry Clinic

Our first contact with the district was in September 1991 when staff took the Mobile Clinic caravan to a 4-day khulu at Khayakhulu as part of a Community Health and Development Exhibition and Conference. The staff also attended the 67th Anniversary Celebrations at the invitation of Chief and Mrs SM Zibi.

Lack of funding and time has prevented efficient follow-up and a development of a podiatry service to the area.

However, Chief Zibi visited our TWR Podiatry Clinic in early August to invite us to their latest Health Day. Health Day

The day was organised by the hospital staff in the region to provide information to the Care Groups on Maternal and Child care. The Podiatry Clinic of the TWR was invited to address the gathering on podiatric care of the pregnant mother and newborn.

We concentrated on advising health care workers on the need to identify possible disorders and deformities of children when the babies are examined. They were requested to identify skin lesions or postural deformities in the child that could in later life develop gait and/or orthopaedic deformities.



Part of the large number of mothers who presented their children for podiatric examination at the maternal and child care Health Day. In the foreground is Mahomed Abramjee, who also addressed the delegates on podiatric care.

The gathering was also addressed by the Chairman of the National Advisory Committee on Health and the Deputy Minister of Health for Bophuthatswana, Mr NJ Mabalane. The speakers identified the need for regional podiatric care for the community in keeping with the government's slogan: "Health for All by the year 2000".

Interest from the nurses and Care Groups flowed after the lecture with problems they experienced and the big question all posed was "When will there be a podiatrist to serve the rural communities in the region?"

Conclusion

The entire event was an eye-opener into the way of life of the rural South African. The emphasis on primary health care always existed and, prior to this, podiatry never seemed to get priority. The requirement exists for the training of health workers in identifying the need for a patient to receive podiatric care and also for the appointment of a podiatrist to regularly visit a central point in this region to treat such patients.

Interest from the Chief of the region, Chief SM Zibi and his wife, a qualified community health nurse, prompted their invitation for podiatrists to attend to the needs of their region — and we hope that this aspect of podiatry will be an important part of student studies in the future.