

PPREV (June) GENERAL NEWS

Covid-19 Change in lifestyle conditions

Discovery Health has flagged a spike in lifestyle conditions, like diabetes and cardiovascular diseases, in Covid-19 survivors, reported *Fin24* (January 2023).

Discovery Health surveyed more than 7 000 of its members who had fully recovered from Covid-19, asking them how they felt after fighting the virus. Of those 7 000 people, 6.5% said communicating had become harder. A third of respondents said they found concentrating immediately after their recovery difficult. But the most common complaints were headaches (31%), breathlessness (14%) and insomnia (14%).

Discovery Health's healthcare data on diabetes and cardiovascular diseases shows that "previously healthy people" who caught Covid-19 have a 2.7 times higher likelihood of diabetes diagnosis within 12 months of recovering from the virus, and the risk of the onset of cardiac problems was 1.5 times higher among Covid-19 survivors and 3.5 times higher in the hospitalised group.

Meanwhile the Director-General of the World Health Organisation (WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said Covid-19 is still regarded as a public health emergency of international concern, its highest form of an alert.

COVID WHO downgrades Covid-19 pandemic

BBC News reported on 5 May that the World Health Organization WHO was downgrading COVID-19 and no longer characterising it as a global health emergency.

The UN health agency first declared the coronavirus to be an international crisis on Jan. 30, 2020.

WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus announced the change during a media briefing held with reporters at the agency's headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. But he clarified that this does not mean the pandemic is over.

Covid-19 remains a threat

"Even though the global Covid-19 crisis has officially ended after more than three years, the virus is still causing deaths every four minutes," reported *Bloomberg* (25 May 2023).

"The virus that has caused at least 20-m deaths globally continues to mutate, leaving the elderly and those with underlying health conditions vulnerable to unpredictable medical accessibility, scant protection from others who are not wearing masks or recently vaccinated, and largely reliant on chance.

"While some companies like Moderna and Pfizer continue to update their vaccines and try to make them easier to produce and store, many innovative approaches conceived at the outset have been abandoned."

Covid led to highest mortality rate

Discovery Health Medical Scheme (DHMS) has reported that Covid-19 was the primary cause of death among its members in 2021, resulting in the highest mortality rate it has ever documented, reported *Business Day* (2 June 2023).

The age- and gender-standardised mortality rates peaked in DHMS's history in 2021, rising to

767 per 100 000 life-years from 542 the previous year. This surge contrasts starkly with the decade-long trend of decreasing mortality rates before the pandemic, noted Shirley Collie, Discovery Health's chief research actuary.

AIDS infects over 1 000 a week in KZN

New figures revealed that about 1 300 people between the ages of 15 and 24 are weekly being infected by HIV in KwaZulu-Natal, reported *The Citizen* (22 June 2023).

“Despite operating the world’s most extensive antiretroviral (ARV) treatment programme, South Africa also experiences the largest HIV epidemic globally, with nearly 8-m South Africans living with HIV, around 5.5-m undergoing ARV treatment, and an estimated 2-m undiagnosed. Phaahla said SA has 94% of people living with HIV aware of their status; 77% of these individuals are on ARV treatment, and 92% of those on treatment have a suppressed viral load. To reach the 95-95-95 goals, he said, we need to start an additional 1.4-m people on treatment.”

‘Obesity is a disease and should be treated as such’

Obesity is not getting the medical attention it needs in SA, according to a specialist endocrinologist Dr Sindeep Bhana from the Centre of Advanced Medicine and head of diabetes, endocrinology and metabolism at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital. – *TimesLive* (5 March 2023)

Despite obesity being a public health crisis, it was mostly regarded as a non-medical issue, even by doctors, he said. Bhana said that in SA, obesity is blamed on patients, and the responsibility of losing weight is put squarely on their shoulders.

According to Prof Shingai Mutambirwa, urology department head at the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University, it is “not too late to turn the tide on obesity”. The issue needs to be a discussion for everybody in the country, including medical practitioners, the government and patients, so that we all recognise obesity is a medical condition which needs to be addressed.

Meanwhile, Discovery Vitality’s latest ‘ObeCity Index’ revealed that about 68% of South African women and 31% of SA men are either overweight or obese. About 13% of children under five are either overweight or obese. The results of its analysis of 300 000 Vitality Health checks completed by members in SA’s six biggest cities were released to raise awareness of the health risks associated with being overweight or obese. The proportion of Vitality members who had a healthy weight ranked Cape Town first, followed by Johannesburg, Durban, Pretoria, Bloemfontein and Gqeberha. The healthy weight assessment was based on body mass index (BMI) and waist circumference. The African Centre for Obesity Prevention estimates that about 3.91-m SA schoolchildren will be overweight or obese by 2025.

‘Failures offer a chance to innovate’

“The best way to anticipate the future is to shape it,” Barry Childs, co-CEO of Insight Actuaries and Consultants, told attendees of the recent Board of Healthcare Funders’ conference - echoing the words of the late Austrian-American management guru Peter Drucker. – *City Press* (28 May 2023)

“New developments require time and effort to investigate and cultivate; they don’t emerge spontaneously. Things to aspire for and work towards include AI and other technologies, enhanced access, and innovation.

Another speaker at the conference, Khaya Skhosana, CEO of Carepoint Advisory, said “risk management and oversight need to be ingrained in scheme governance structures. This would involve risk identification, analysis, planning, response, review, monitoring, and regular updates. Within the

declining political climate, Skhosana stated that the primary emerging risk was the total collapse of the public healthcare system”.

More than 120 unregistered doctors arrested in ongoing blitz

An ongoing crackdown by the **Health Professions Council of South Africa** (HPCSA) has led to the arrests of 124 unregistered doctors by the SAPS, according to Health Minister Joe Phaahla, who said the council had established an Inspectorate Office for this very purpose. - *Medical Brief* (14 June 2023)

The unregistered doctors evade the system by joining the private sector where they can be paid in cash or operate in practices of registered doctors, he added.

Section 17 of the **Health Professions Act** (Act 56 of 1974) makes registration with the council a prerequisite to practise any health profession and it is a criminal offence to practice without this, reports *IOL*.