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Can we make a difference?

The annual SA Heart® congress is scheduled to take place from Thursday 31 October - Sunday 3 November 2019 at the Sandton Conference Centre. The congress theme for this year is “Cardiac Care: Meeting the needs of Africa”. This is a highly pertinent issue in a world where, according to the 2013 Global Burden of Disease Study, cardiovascular disease (CVD) has been identified as the leading cause of death worldwide. It is predicted that CVD will surpass HIV/AIDS as the leading cause of death in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) within the next decade. The congress theme and topics were thus selected to facilitate a focus on where? and how? modern cardiac care can be most effectively utilised in an under-resourced environment.

When comparing this conference to previous years, regular attendees will note some changes to the form and content. This year, 5 major cardiac societies have joined forces to highlight problems and explore possible solutions to the challenges inherent to treating heart disease in Africa with SA Heart® partnering with the Pan-African Society of Cardiology (PASCAR), AfricaPCR, the Cardiovascular Magnetic Resonance Congress of South Africa (SA-CMR) and the African Heart Network (AHN). It is wholly appropriate for SA Heart® 2019 to be held in association with AfricaPCR. The case based, interventional programme and joint sessions, as organised by the 2 bodies, have been tailored to focus on areas of contention as well as modern trends in cardiology and their importance for, and relevance to, the practice of cardiology in Africa. PASCAR focuses on identifying key issues to help guide the implementation of treatments and programmes to combat CVD on the African continent. SA-CMR brings a unique imaging dimension to the conference with a timely focus on myocardial and pericardial diseases which are all too prevalent in Africa. The AHN will focus on advocacy and policy in an effort to specifically identify and address unmet needs. This is crucially important if we are to meet the stated aim of the World Health Organisation (WHO) to reduce CVD with 25% by 2025.

The preconference workshops will take place on Thursday 31 October and will include: a stimulating and relevant paediatric programme, a wonderfully practical echocardiographic session, the ever popular “Cardiology for non-cardiologists” under the aegis of HefSSA as well as workshops presented by SA-CMR and CASSA. Every one of these sessions focuses on the acquisition of certain skills which are necessary to improve one’s cardiology practice. These workshops will be followed by the opening plenary on Thursday evening. The PASCAR tradition is that participants wear traditional dress for this function. This initial plenary thus promises to live up to the high standard set at previous congresses in focusing the attention of delegates on the broad theme of the conference. In light of this year’s conference theme, which can be paraphrased as “How to make a difference”, there could scarcely be a more appropriate keynote speaker than Dr Imtiaz Sooliman of Gift of the Givers.

The first morning will see the conference proper presenting a major plenary, put together by AfricaPCR and SA Heart®, with topics such as appropriate management of STEMI, revascularisation in chronic coronary syndromes and TAVI. On the second morning, the initial major plenary session will be the eponymous Bongani Mayosi Memorial Lecture during which many of Bongani's friends and associates will pay tribute to one of Africa's greatest medical sons. The focus will be on rheumatic heart disease with 2 talks specifically emphasising mitral valve disease.

As ever, we are grateful for the ESC's support and their willingness to contribute to the success of our conference. The second major plenary session on Friday and Saturday will include an ESC session focusing on guidelines and modern trends. The format adopted will include multimedia and case-based discussions covering atrial fibrillation, chronic coronary syndromes, pulmonary thromboembolic disease, the diabetic cardiac patient, lipid therapy and heart failure. In addition to the substantial contribution from the ESC, we always welcome input from our Mayo Clinic colleagues who have made particular contributions to the imaging sessions and who have also shared their insights and experience regarding a vast range of topics.

The late Friday afternoon major plenary session is not to be missed. It will include a debate on AF-ablation vs. medical therapy, a presentation on CT angiography, major insights on all forms of management of chronic coronary syndromes from two of the world's experts (Drs Gersh and Wijns) and a bonus presentation on the future of randomised trials presented by Dr Rory Collins.

The final Sunday morning plenary promises to be fun and interactive. It has been divided into 2 sections: "What could go wrong?" and "Where technology made a difference". Other major areas which will be addressed in the special interest sessions will be Athlete's heart, paediatric cardiology (medical and surgical), arrhythmias, hypertension and GUCH.

We have ensured that women are equally represented within the faculty and have also included an appropriate spread of presenters from throughout Africa in addition to our visiting international guests. This conference is unique in that it brings together, for the first time, several major African cardiology bodies. The tremendous cooperation of all in putting together the programme is hereby gratefully acknowledged.

The question which this Congress aims to answer is: **"Can we make a difference?"**