

## Incoming statement of the SATS president, 2022 - 2023



The world and particularly Pulmonology has been a very difficult place these past 2 years, since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Pulmonology is so much more than just COVID, but for many of us we have been able to do little else other than care for those with severe COVID-19 acute respiratory distress syndrome. We have missed face-to-face contact, we have

missed out on conferences and learning opportunities and our patients have missed out on us being able to care for the 'normal' respiratory illness.

As we look forward to the "new normal", we have an opportunity to do things better and to be more involved in the basics of pulmonology that have been pushed aside by COVID. The huge burden of asthma and unacceptable mortality in South Africa (SA), the inequality of access to care for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) patients, the burden of severe interstitial lung disease and lung cancer with limited access to timely diagnosis and appropriate therapy, the ongoing burden of tuberculosis and drug resistance, the intersection of poverty and air pollution and tobacco smoking all demand our attention.

Ensuring that the people of SA get the respiratory care they need, starts with basic education in respiratory medicine to all health professionals. We need to do better. Access to services and appropriate referral pathways, we need to do better. Access to simple diagnostics such as lung function to make a diagnosis of COPD, we need to do better. Universal access to basic medications such as inhaled steroids and long-acting

bronchodilators for asthma and COPD, we need to do better. Appropriate access for those with rare and life-threatening diseases to effective and innovative medication, we need to do better. Advocating for clean air and tobacco-free environments, we need to do better. Advocating for respiratory health, we need to do better.

We have so much that we can do, we have so much that we should do, but there is only so much that we are able to. As a Society we have the ability to draw on a large group of individuals to collectively make an impact. It may be local, or it may be global – but we must make a difference in our world by caring for the patient in front of us – but also participating in the fight for respiratory health and access to appropriate and affordable care for all our fellow South Africans.

I look forward to leading the South African Thoracic Society for the next 2 years as we face the realities of our "new normal", ensuring that we promote excellence in respiratory care and advocate for all essentials needed for respiratory health in our country.

**Professor Richard van Zyl-Smit**

*President: South African Thoracic Society*