

Care beyond service – The palliative care standard

Issued by [Association of Palliative Care Centres \(APCC\)](#)

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Hospice Week takes place from 5-11 May 2024. Annually, this week focuses on the role the palliative care sector plays in healthcare. In South Africa, The Association of Palliative Care Centres (APCC) is a member organisation for 91 palliative care centres, many of which call themselves hospices.



In 2023, these members cared for 38,228 people. From this, 16,327 (41%) were patients, and 21,901 (59%) were patient household members or loved ones. The predominant diagnosis of patients was HIV/AIDS (37%), followed by Cancer (25%), Chronic illness (23%), Covid (12%), and Tuberculosis (3%). Some patients had more than one diagnosis.

“All of our members adhere to the Standards for Palliative Healthcare Services,” says Dr Ewa Skowronska, CEO of the APCC. “The APCC is the only organisation in South Africa that has developed accredited standards for Palliative Healthcare Services which are services that not only support the thousands of patients cared for nationwide, but their loved ones too. Since the release of the National Policy

Framework and Strategy for Palliative Care, there has been a mushrooming of service providers that are not accredited. Our members are all accredited and constantly working to improve their accreditation statuses with our mentors.”

To support members in gaining their accreditation, the APCC established a mentorship programme. The mentors (who are also members), take other members through the policies, procedures, and protocols necessary to gain a Level 1 accreditation. They then guide them through the other 4 levels. In 2023 and early 2024, 14 members managed to increase their star level by an additional star.

“I have been providing mentoring for member organisations for a number of years now,” says Warren Oxford-Huggett, CEO of Msunduzi Hospice Association. “The immense value and privilege of being able to provide this mentorship is overwhelmingly positive.”

“It is wonderful to see other members around the country and help them implement the Standards,” says fellow mentor Hillary Grey, CEO of Knysna-Sedgefield Hospice. “It is about taking what they do and growing that rather than trying to squeeze them into a mould, a very satisfying experience. We find and share best practices. I also love working with the other mentors who help interpret when in there is doubt. Palliative care is all about team, so this is an extension of that.”

Says Evelyn Makanda, general manager of Lambano Sanctuary: “The APCC brings a wealth of expertise and experience. Their guidance has helped us navigate complex challenges, providing insights and best practices that we can apply directly to our work. Through the industry body, we’ve related to a vast network of professionals, these connections have opened doors to new opportunities, partnerships, and resources that have enhanced our day-to-day operations.”

“Hospice White River was fortunate enough to be a part of the first round of mentorship and learning provided by the APCC,” says Terran Gericke, manager of Hospice White River. “The goal was to increase our star rating from two to three stars, which we did with the help of the dedicated APCC team. It was an intimidating experience at first but with the helping hand of our mentors after a site visit and some training we were on our way to success.”

The patient stories received from APCC members supports the excellence of the service received. In a letter to APCC member, HospiceWits, Sasha Ryan writes: “I watched with wonder as you seamlessly integrated the art and science of nursing, masterfully navigating the complex web of medical procedures, medications, and treatments. You provided a safe

harbour amidst the tempest, instilling hope and fostering an environment of healing, love, and trust.”

“When mentoring members in a hospice setting, it enhances the quality of care provided to patients and supports the professional and personal growth of staff,” says Tersia Burger, CEO of Stepping Stones Hospice and APCC mentor. “By sharing my knowledge of working with medical aids, we have managed to improve the sustainability and growth in some hospices.”

“Palliative care is the physical, psychological, social, and spiritual care provided to persons living with a life-threatening illness,” says Skowronska. “Care is offered from the point of diagnosis and extends to bereavement support if needed. Palliative care is an international human right for all persons living with a life-threatening illness. We are honoured to work with our members to continue ensuring that we provide quality palliative care to all in South Africa. With Care beyond Service.”

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Formerly known as the HPCA, the APCC is the new brand (from 1st September 2023). As a registered NPO, APCC is a member organisation for palliative care service providers, many of whom call themselves hospices. Members care for over 100,000 patients and loved ones per year (primarily in the comfort of their own homes). The APCC champions and supports both members and palliative care as a healthcare speciality.

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