

Prevention is better than cure

By Nicci Botha

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We're entering a new era of healthcare where the emphasis is on patient-based medical care and risk management. Throw into the mix advances in genetic testing, and science has come a long way in preventing potentially life-threatening conditions rather than trying to cure them.



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"We see far too many individuals who expect medicine to simply 'fix everything'. Preventative care is key to improving prognosis and it is vital that medical conditions are picked up early especially conditions such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes," says Dr Hendrik Hanekom, Intercare CEO, at the company's newest facility in Cape Town's northern suburbs.

Genes: the crystal ball of prevention

Ever since Angelina Jolie famously underwent a double mastectomy as a preventative measure against her family history of breast cancer, the popularity of genetic testing to predict an individual's susceptibility to hereditary conditions has grown.

In this regard, Intercare offers two advanced genetic screening tests through the Geneva-based genomics company, Genoma. The first, Serenity, is an advanced genetic test for the early detection of hereditary breast and ovarian cancer risk. The second test is Tranquillity, an accurate, non-invasive and risk-free prenatal test (NIPT), which screens for chromosomal disorders and abnormalities that cause conditions such as Down syndrome.

Passing it on

"Most people know that what they choose to eat and drink, and whether they choose to exercise or not affects their health, but they don't see how those lifestyle choices start changing the cells and the organs inside their bodies."

These changes can also have an adverse effect on their children. Take, for example, foetal-alcohol syndrome. Although it's generally accepted that maternal alcohol consumption is responsible for the condition, [a new study](#) indicates that alcohol can alter the genes in the cells of the father's sperm, which can also contribute.

Integrated healthcare approach

Intercare brands itself as a risk-management company, rather than a healthcare group, with a focus on the individual. At the new Panorama centre, the emphasis is on integrated and preventative healthcare services. It's dedicated an entire section of its practice to multi-disciplinary team care including general practitioners, a dietitian, biokineticist, nurses, disease management, as well as wellness screenings.

"People only start noticing adverse effects when the symptoms start manifesting physically. Individuals need to comprehend just how integral their lifestyle behaviours are to their health. And they need to truly own the fact that this responsibility lies solely with them.' Hanekom says.

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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