



Building Children's Nursing for Africa Conference 2017: 'Pillars of Practice'

A participative conference for neonatal, paediatric and paediatric critical care nurses to celebrate and build on what nurses do well in caring for children and their families.

Conference highlights from day one

Conference highlights from Tuesday 28th March

This is the third Building Children's Nursing conference co-hosted by the Child Nurse Practice Development Initiative at the Department of Pediatrics and Child Health and the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital of the Western Cape Department of Health.

Delegates from 11 countries greeted one another, renewing friendships formed during training at UCT.

Wamkelekile (welcome)



Professor Bongani Mayosi, Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Cape Town, opened the conference, bringing greetings from all the staff and students of the Faculty. As nursing celebrates 80 years at UCT, delegates applauded as Prof Mayosi said "There is no doubt that the CNPDI is a jewel in the crown of the Faculty of Health Sciences, the University of Cape Town, South Africa, and even the world. You are transforming the face of child nursing on the face of the African continent to the benefit of all our children."

You stand with me

As has become tradition, children stole the show at the first day of the conference. Rustenberg Girls' Junior School choir treated delegates to a performance of a specially written song expressing their thanks to all nurses. It contained the wonderful lines: "When I am ill you stand with me. You are working for health and victory. Siyabonga (thank you) we honour you. Baai dankie (thank you) for all you do."

Children are the future – and children's nursing is the future of nursing

Prof Jean Johnson, Emeritus Professor of Nursing, George Washington University USA, spoke on the challenge of nursing leadership. Prof Johnson recounted how the face of nursing in the US was changed forever by the beginning of the nurse practitioner programme. That process has begun in Africa too now, with the Masters in Nursing (Child Nursing) programme at UCT. And it is absolutely right, said Prof Johnson, that this process should begin with pediatrics. Prof Johnson spoke about the unique challenges of leadership for nurses. Nursing more than any other profession integrates both the science and the compassion of caring. Nurses need to achieve that same integration in their leadership as well. Prof Johnson challenged delegates to 'get with the numbers', and to move into the discomfort zone of statistics and budgets.

We thought we were the only ones who could care for children

Jane Booth of the Red Cross War Memorial Children’s Hospital, Cape Town, described her experience of establishing and running the Breatheasy programme, a unique programme for children on long term ventilation which makes it possible for children to be successfully cared for at home with their families. There are many obstacles and challenges to enabling children with long term ventilation needs to go home, including poverty and inequality. But Jane regarded the biggest obstacle to discharge as professional paternalism, “...because we did not have faith in mothers and families.” Exercising nursing leadership in this situation meant changing long established practices. Jane beautifully illustrated how a nursing leader can respond to the challenge of ‘getting with the numbers’. Speaking with authority, based on measurement and data, she demonstrated that while it costs R10,000 per day to keep a child in hospital, it costs R100,000 to send a child home on a ventilator through the Breatheasy programme, representing a very significant cost saving to health budgets.

The courage to listen and respond

Alex White (13) screened a specially made video featuring childrens nurses, mothers and young patients at the Red Cross hospital. The video contained an inspiring message for nurses about being seen, and being brave. **Assoc. Prof Minette Coetzee** of the Child Nurse Practice Development Initiative asked delegates, over the rest of the conference, to identify the thing that being brave in exercising nursing leadership requires from each of us.



The morning concluded with a standing ovation for the **RedX Radio team**, who shared their powerful and courageous stories. Gabriel Urgotti set another leadership challenge for children’s the need for nurses to balance the child’s right to be protected, with the child’s right to participate. RedX Radio will launch officially on May 20th, and is going to play a big part in improving understanding between adults and children involved in healthcare through inter-generational dialogue. If as nurses we listen carefully to what children say, and are brave enough to take the actions we need to respond, then we will be able to make much needed improvements to health care.