

Quality advisor keen to further COHSASA's mission

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Dr Abigail van der Linde joined COHSASA Quality Adviser Team on 1 December 2015. She brings with her a solid commitment and dedication to ensuring that all people - regardless of age, race, income and health status - have the best possible healthcare available.

She is not naïve: she knows resources are limited but she believes that systemic improvement in healthcare facilities has the potential to positively impact the lives of others and she wants to be part of that.

"That is why I have joined COHSASA. I believe the company's mission, vision and values align directly with my own. Nobody should be excluded from receiving safe and quality healthcare, particularly in South Africa. "

Dr van der Linde, who grew up in Kimberly, has always wanted to be a doctor. Her childish games usually involved a make-believe stethoscope and sutures in her teddy bear. Her parents are immensely proud of her achievement (she says she has "surprised" them) and they recall that from a very early age she had medicine in mind.



Dr Abigail van der Linde

When Nelson Mandela visited Abigail's school in her Grade 7 year, the pupils formed a guard of honour to greet him. He noticed her and asked her what her name was.

"Abigail."

"Oh," said Mr Mandela, "and what do you want to be when you are grown up?"

"A doctor."

"Good. Then I had better not get sick until you can heal me!"

Although she was an average pupil in primary school, she blossomed at high school and after earning a couple of distinctions in her Matric year, Abigail received a bursary to study for an MBChB at Stellenbosch University.

She completed this in 2009, followed by a two-year internship at the Kimberley Hospital Complex in the Northern Cape and a year of community service in a primary health care setting in a Department of Defence facility.

She returned to the Kimberley Hospital Complex and worked as Medical Officer in critical care and family medicine, finally making her way to anaesthetics. Along the way, from 2011 to 2013, she collected a couple of diplomas: Basic Life Support (BLS), Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ADLS) and Advanced Trauma Life Support.

"I thought I might specialise in anaesthetics, having worked with an extremely impressive doctor, Philip Kenny, the Head of Department and Consultant in Anaesthetics at the Kimberley Hospital Complex. I obtained a Diploma in Anaesthesia from the College of Anaesthetists of South Africa in 2014 while I worked at Tygerberg Hospital. After a few months, however, it became clear to me that my heart was not - as I had supposed - in anaesthetics.

"I have always been passionate about helping people and having an impact on lives. When I met a medical colleague who was working at COHSASA at the time, I was intrigued to hear about the work being done. It seemed interesting to me and I love to travel, even though I know the kind of travelling that Quality Advisers do for COHSASA is taxing in the extreme! But I was fascinated by changes that can be brought about through adhering to international standards. I love the idea of a hospital working as a well-oiled machine.

"In fact, I have always had a dream of setting up the perfect hospital, a "utopia" in a sad and neglected part of Africa. It is a vision that drives me. At this hospital, there would be the best possible equipment and technology which would be maintained according to world-class standards. Experts in all fields of medicine would be on the staff and they would treat their patients with dignity and respect. I want that vision realised."

Emerging from an embattled public health system in South Africa, Abigail is even more determined to make a change; have an impact.

"The COHSASA colleague advised me to hand in my CV. I forgot about it but was thrilled when I received a call to come in for an interview. And here I am."

She will soon be leading a very busy life in Cape Town and travelling throughout Africa.

"Of course, I will miss my family - my Mom Dad and sister who live Kimberley. But I shall keep myself busy."

She is a keen interior decorator (and has completed a short course in the subject) and delights in creativity, principally music and graphic art.

Abigail is a gentle woman who exudes compassion but there is a steely determination in her eye. She wants to make a difference.

"I want to heal people with love and then with medicine."

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COHSASA



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