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How the local church can get involved in health care.

This document has been prepared by a group of Christian doctors in consultation with the Christian Alliance (various Christian health care organisations) and the National Department of Health (NDoH).

It is everybody's responsibility to promote and maintain the health of people and if we want to improve the health of South Africans, much greater emphasis should be given to this as well as the prevention of disease. Literature shows that believers are often in better health due to:

- awareness of how precious a healthy body and mind is,
- being accountable to God to look well after your body,
- being part of a caring faith community can help coping with illness and ageing.

Here are practical ideas and suggestions how churches can be involved in assisting health care institutions to improve the health of the people and their congregation.

1. Promotion of healthy living.

Major health problems, such as hypertension and diabetes, are directly related to eating habits and body weight. Simple interventions, such as the reduction of salt intake and the reduction of sugar, can have significant health benefits. The majority of South Africans are overweight. Weight reduction and control should therefore be a priority for people who want to take care of their bodies. The risks of being overweight and obesity are well documented and include strokes, heart attacks and cancer. The Bible certainly teaches moderation when it comes to eating and drinking. Churches usually have health care workers who can assist with screening and education. Local clinic staff can also be invited to do this for congregations. We can provide you with a template how to do this. We recommend the 'I change for health programme' as a good example how this can be done. See www.pharmadynamics.co.za or phone their customer care line 021-7077000.

2. Taking care of the sick and the aged.

Most churches look after their sick members and visit them in hospital or at home. Have you ever thought of extending this care to adopting a hospital ward or a clinic in your community? The aim of this is to be involved in the rendering of holistic patient care. This does not only involve spiritual care of patients, but also supporting the nursing and medical staff to render optimal patient care and providing assistance in practical matters. Many churches give special attention to their health care professionals on 'Health Care Sunday' in October every year. HospiVision provides University of Pretoria accredited training for church members in spiritual and pastoral care for the sick, their families and health care

workers (www.hospivision.org.za / friend@hospivision.org.za / 012-3299492) and Healthcare Christian Fellowship (HCF) provides practical guidance for the project 'Adopt a Ward'.

3. Community health workers and primary health care.

The NDoH wants to improve health care for everybody and promote health at a household level. The plan is to train thousands of community health workers who will work in ward-based outreach teams (WBOT). Community health workers can make a great impact on their community if they are compassionate, well trained carers. Church members with an interest in the health and well-being of their community could apply for this training and in this way contribute to health promotion, early detection and prevention of by visiting and screening their community in their homes. Interested churches can visit the WBOT pilot project in Mamelodi. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQv-U7mk5MM.

4. Dispensing of chronic medication.

The NDoH has approved a plan to dispense the medication for chronic patients via shops and local churches, especially in areas where there are mobile or no clinics. People with hypertension, diabetes, asthma, HIV/AIDS and TB can get their medication every month from their local church if it has been registered with this Central Chronic Medicine Dispensing and Distribution Programme (CCMDD) programme. In this way, the church can make a very important contribution to the provision of medication to large groups of people who are on long term and often lifelong treatment. If a patient's disease is well controlled they can ask their doctor for a prescription and collect the medication at a distribution point close to their home. It will save people a lot on transport money and time, as well as reducing the long queues in clinics and hospital outpatient departments. Three or six month check-ups will still happen at the clinic or hospital. This programme can be combined with health education and support groups by the community health workers or nurses or doctors in the congregation. For more information contact the Project Manager, Helecine Zeeman, at helecine.zeeman@hst.org.za.

5. HIV/AIDS.

HIV/AIDS has become a chronic disease, but treatment is possible for everybody who qualifies. The biggest challenge is to reduce the number of new infections. If your congregation is situated in an area where HIV infections are common, we recommend that your church forms a committee to look at combatting the spread of HIV. At the same time there should be a plan to support infected and affected people by encouraging a healthy sexual lifestyle and faithfulness. This is of crucial importance for all pregnant women, but also for anyone who is sexually active. Early detection of HIV infection and timeous treatment prevents so much unnecessary suffering and loss of health, income and even sometimes life. In 2015, all faith based organisations are encouraged to get involved in the fight against HIV and the church has a wonderful opportunity to make a contribution. For more information on the role of the church and HIV you can contact CABSAs. See www.cabsa.org.za . The SA National Aids Council (SANAC) is initiating a new programme for the youth called the Dreams Initiative (<http://www.pepfar.gov/partnerships/ppp/dreams/index.htm>).

6. Mother and child health.

Compared with international standards, mother and child health in South Africa is severely below par. Too many young children and mothers die of preventable diseases. Churches can

encourage expectant women to attend antenatal clinics to have necessary health screens. They can also register for a new programme offering free guidance and advice to South African mothers called 'Mom Connect'. The midwife at the antenatal clinic takes care of the registration. Monitoring the growth and development of all infants and children is one of the most important interventions, together with the immunization against common infectious diseases. Also, the role of the father is often neglected in improving mother and child health and should be promoted.

7. Recruiting young people to become health care workers.

South Africa has great need for young compassionate health care workers, especially in light of great shortages nationwide. The church can play an important role by encouraging young church members to consider a career in health care. Provincial Departments of Health give bursaries to bright young people to train as nurses, clinical associates, allied health care workers or doctors.

8. Training your health care workers to integrate their faith into their work.

HCF, CMF and Hospivision have an excellent tool which can be used to train health care workers, doctors and pastors to integrate the spiritual dimension into everyday health care practice in clinics, hospices and hospitals. Our organisations are very willing to come to your church or hospital to present a one-day Saline Process training session. It better equips health care workers to address the spiritual needs of the patient. The local committee is responsible for advertising the course and organizing a venue. We provide the trainers and the training materials. See the HCF or CMF website for more details on the Saline Process training.

9. Support for health care workers.

Many health care workers suffer from burn-out and fatigue due to the demands placed on them. They are sometimes also traumatized by exposure to suffering on a regular basis. Churches are encouraged to reach out to health workers in general and refer those with special needs to HCF or CMF for counselling.

For churches who want to implement one of these projects and need help, they are invited to contact Erica or Thembi at the Christian Health Care Alliance hcf@lantic.net or Anzelle at office@cmf.org.za.

