CONVENORS MESSAGE

Welcome to the 26th Annual South African Heart Association Congress

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It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the 26th Annual SA Heart® Congress held at the Cape Town International Convention Centre from 30 October to 1 November. This year's congress, titled "Comprehensive cardiac care", reflects both the remarkable breadth of contemporary cardiovascular medicine and the increasingly multidisciplinary approach required to provide optimal care for our patients.

Comprehensive cardiac care is about more than the increasing sophistication of our diagnostic and therapeutic capabilities. It requires collaboration between disciplines, an appreciation of the patient as a whole, and recognition that we achieve the best outcomes when we combine our individual areas of expertise. This year's congress was designed with this philosophy in mind.

This year, therefore, marks an important change in the format of our congress. In previous years, multiple parallel tracks – while providing an extensive range of specialised content – presented the challenge of ensuring adequate interest and attendance across the various sessions. Over time, this resulted in a somewhat fragmented meeting, with delegates often having to choose between several competing areas of interest.

Consequently, the SA Heart® Executive Committee made the innovative decision to consolidate this year's congress into a single multidisciplinary track, running alongside a dedicated paediatric cardiology track. This is intended to encourage greater interaction between our various special interest groups (SIG), including SASCI, HeFSSA, CASSA, CISSA, ISCAP, and SASCAR, and to allow delegates to engage with areas of cardiovascular medicine beyond their own fields of expertise.

Complementing the main programme is the introduction of a "learning pod" – a new addition to the congress that will allow our SIGs to host focused and specialised sessions. One example is the interactive session on left ventricular assist device therapy developed by Dr Sarah Kraus on behalf of HeFSSA. This new format has not been attempted at previous congresses, and I am confident our Scientific Steering Committee has risen to the challenge by developing a stimulating, diverse educational programme featuring both local and international experts in cardiovascular medicine. The programme has been deliberately designed to be inclusive, allowing each of our SIGs to share their expertise while enabling delegates to engage with a broader spectrum of cardiovascular medicine.

Cardiology continues to advance at a remarkable pace, and we are fortunate to have an outstanding international faculty joining us this year. Leading experts from the Mayo Clinic – including Profs Leslie Cooper, Rowlens Melduni, Hector Michelena, and Vuyisile Nkomo – will share their expertise in areas ranging from myocarditis and echocardiography to valvular and structural heart disease. Their participation, together with that of our many distinguished local faculty members, offers an opportunity for meaningful exchange between international experience and the unique challenges of cardiovascular care in South Africa.

The congress begins on day 1 with the ever-popular paediatric cardiology, cardiac imaging, and electrophysiology workshops, followed by the opening plenary session. Profs Alfonso Pecoraro,

Lisel Zülke, and Leslie Cooper will discuss the development of innovative cardiac care programmes. A combined SA Heart®/European Society of Cardiology session on adult congenital heart disease will follow, with contributions from Profs Marc Gewillig of the University of Leuven and George McDaniel of the University of Virginia, both of whom will also contribute to the paediatric cardiology programme.

Among the many other highlights is a session on artificial intelligence (AI) in cardiology, developed by Dr David Jankelow. AI represents an important and potentially disruptive development in medicine, and Prof Faisal Syed from the University of North Carolina will challenge us with his provocative presentation, "The ECG will see you now". He will also contribute to the cardiac electrophysiology programme and debate Dr Bradley Griffiths on the role of left atrial appendage occlusion in managing atrial fibrillation.

Structural heart disease will be explored through a challenging case presentation by Prof Hellmuth Weich, while Prof Ruchika Meel, editor of the SA Heart® Journal, will lead an important session for our aspiring researchers, "Clinician–scientist pathway: Education and career tips". HeFSSA will broaden our understanding of myocarditis under the guidance of Prof Leslie Cooper, a leading international expert and founder of the Myocarditis Foundation, and Prof Michael Böhm of Saarland University in Germany will provide further insights into the prevention and management of heart failure. In coronary intervention, one of the current frontiers in the management of coronary artery disease – the modification of coronary calcification – will be addressed by Dr Abdul Mozid from Leeds General Infirmary, together with our local expert, Dr Adie Horak.

The programme also recognises that comprehensive cardiac care extends beyond technological advances and procedural expertise. On day 3, 2 thought-provoking ethics sessions will address the often-neglected issue of end-of-life care in cardiology, as well as the ethical considerations surrounding innovative and unproven therapies, using the experience of a patient with refractory ventricular tachycardia as a starting point for discussion.

Our cardiology fellows will once again present exciting and informative case studies from our various academic units. These sessions are always among the highlights of the congress, providing an opportunity to showcase the knowledge, enthusiasm, and potential of our young and emerging clinicians.

The congress concludes with "Cardiology for non-cardiologists", a HeFSSA-led programme aimed at general practitioners and specialist physicians. This consistently well-attended programme reflects an important principle of comprehensive cardiac care: that improving cardiovascular outcomes depends not only on cardiologists, but on collaboration across the broader medical community.

None of this would be possible without the support of our industry partners. I would like to express my sincere appreciation for their continued commitment to SA Heart® and their contribution to making this year's congress possible. I would also like to thank the members of the Scientific Steering Committee, who have worked tirelessly to develop a stimulating, informative, and memorable programme. Most importantly, I hope this congress gives us an opportunity not only to learn, but also to reconnect with friends and colleagues, establish new professional relationships, and share ideas across the boundaries of our individual subspecialities. I wish you all an enjoyable and rewarding congress, and a very warm welcome to Cape Town.