

Katrina Jacobs goes the extra mile for her TB patients

Not even a pandemic can deter community health worker Katrina Jacobs from conducting door-to-door health visits to her tuberculosis (TB) patients living in informal settlements and backyard dwellings in Samora Machel and Heinz Park in Phillipi, Western Cape.



Katrina Jacobs

She visits patients not accessing services at the Weltevreden Clinic and when she receives patient home visit referrals from the Western Cape's Department of Health's Klipfontein and Mitchells Plain Substructure's Community-Base Services coordinators after the nurse conducts her home visit.

"I have a passion for this job and if patients are not coming to the clinic, then I go and fetch them and lead them back for their health. I ask the nurses to give me the medication and information of those TB patients who are not attending the clinic and I fetch them at home and pay their taxi fare if they can't afford to attend the clinic for their scheduled checkup with the doctor.

"Many of my patients are taking their TB medication, but they either forget their appointment date with the doctor, are under the influence of substances, or are too scared to come to the clinic to see the doctor because they fear that they will get the coronavirus at the clinic.

"I make sure that they wear their masks and come with me to the clinic. Most are willing, but some run away when they hear that I am searching for them, but I eventually find them and lead them back to the clinic," Jacobs, who is contracted non-profit organisation called Arisen Women in Mitchells Plain, says.

Passionate, hardworking and funny

"Once, Katrina asked me a few days later for the medication of a Covid-19 positive client she finally found. She happily delivered the person's medication to the new address. She went in her own time to search for the patient and asked at various homes where the person had relocated. She goes the extra mile, is passionate, hardworking, funny and she loves the community.

“During the lockdown, a violent protest erupted in Heinz Park, but brave Katrina made sure that her colleague was safely escorted out of the area by using a rake to clear the burning tyres so that she could drive through,” says Chantal Scoble, supervisor at Arisen Women.

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, she serves her community with extra caution. “I am so sad that I can’t enter my patients' homes any longer. I have to screen and educate people outside while they are talking to me from a distance, but I express my care to them through my body language and excited hand and arm gestures,” Jacobs says.

“Sometimes it’s not easy to determine if my TB patients have Covid-19, but with the Covid-19 screening tool and the department’s healthcare team on call, deciding to refer them for testing or to safely isolate at home is not so stressful.

“I wear my uniform, mask and visor and only enter the patient’s home if the person is bedridden and there is no other family member at home to assist with medication and care, but this is a rare experience during Covid-19,” she says.

Hardship and compassion

Katrina has a five-year-old son and an elderly family member with comorbidities, therefore she takes extra caution to make sure she keeps them safe. She ensures that she undresses and disinfects herself before entering her home, as well as washing her hands often and thoroughly.

Her resilience is dedicated to the hardship she experienced when caring for her father who suffered from and succumbed to TB years ago. “Those years my family didn’t know how to take care of my father properly because he was stubborn, and I was the only one who could care for him because I am just as thick-skinned as he was. We used to live in Philippi and those years we never had taxis or transport, so I used to carry my dad on my back to the Phillipi Clinic for his treatment,” Jacobs says.

She loved caring for her father, which ignited a compassionate fire and desire within her to care for elderly people and those with a life-threatening illness.

“ I want to inspire other women to persevere and be joyful in challenging times. Be caring, kind and loving towards others, as you don’t know what their life story is and what they are going through. ”

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