

South African wins 2009 Evelyn Nicholson Award for International Caregiver

South African Dale Kempen was awarded the 2009 Evelyn Nicholson Award for International Caregiver by the Multiple Sclerosis International Federation (MSIF). The award was established in 1994 and recognises people who are, or have been, outstanding volunteer caregivers.

Allen O'Connor, chairman PwMSIC, commented that there were ten excellent contenders for the award, but it was "Dale's commitment, not only to Ken (her husband who has MS) but to all those people with MS, and their families, in the Alberton MS Support Group, (that) made her nomination stand out."

Kempen will receive UK£500 towards a chair hoist for a caregiver in the Alberton community as identified by her during the nomination stage.

The first award in 1994 was won by Harry Bell, also a South African. Kempen's award comes together with the very first International MS World Day celebrated on 27 May 2009.

Dale Kempen's motivation for the award:

"Ken Kempen was diagnosed with Chronic Progressive Multiple Sclerosis in 1984 at the age of 44. It was a heavy blow for the Kempen family, MS was then not a known disease in South Africa, so information was scarce and family members, friends and colleagues were mostly ignorant about the condition.

Dale, Ken's wife and mother of their three children gave up her work at a medical distribution firm two years later when Ken's condition deteriorated rapidly and he was medically boarded. By now, she had acquired a good knowledge about Multiple Sclerosis and the Kempens were pleasantly surprised to find and join a MS Support group in their area.

It was a foregone conclusion thus when the support group leader chose to stand down that Dale would take over leadership of the South East Rand Multiple Sclerosis Support Group in Alberton, South Africa, then with a membership of seven. She shared her increasing MS knowledge with her children, family and other people with MS. At support group activities her family would interact with newly diagnosed and their families, helping them to come to terms with their situation. Her keen interest in matters MS also inspired Ken to contribute to and interact with other people with MS.

At age 61 Dale has become a formidable informant on Multiple Sclerosis. Andrea Hohenwarter (diagnosed in 1991) commented that "...she is such an activist, backs every member of the group and has such practical experience for every day coping". Carol Booyse (diagnosed 2002) says that "Dale is always there when you need her!" Both ladies

agree that Dale tends to her 81 members and their families as lovingly and thoroughly as she would her husband. Dale arranges frequent information sessions with medical professionals for the group and phones through, or personally delivers the data to those members who are housebound and cannot attend. She raises her own funds in aid of social support for the group members and advocates MS at every opportunity.

They are also members of the MSSA Inland Branch and often request help or support when needed. Or, she would provide information on unusual or unique situations that would be of help to the society in the future.

Ken Kempen is 80% bedridden at this stage, but with Dale's help still participates in support group events when possible. He certainly does not look 64 years of age. Many tease and say it is due to the special care he has received! But, Dale has shown a tenacity seldom seen in similar circumstances - she has risen above a situation and made it her own, made it her family's own and to boot tirelessly serve 81 PwMS and their families.

'It is simply God at work.' - Dale's humble comment."

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