

Healthgivers to be honoured

The Shoprite Checkers Women of the Year announces finalists in the Health Care-Givers category and three exceptional and visionary women have been selected as finalists in the Health Care-Givers category of the Shoprite Checkers Women of the Year Award.



Finalists in the Health Care-Giver category in the Shoprite Checkers Women of the Year Award: Frances Hartley (left), Esme Singleton and Jane Munyadziwa Dzebu.

The panel of judges sifted through hundreds of entries to select three finalists in each of the five categories of the Award which searched for women who have achieved in their own fields with the determination and foresight to make an impact on the future of fellow South Africans.

The finalists' achievements are wide ranging and their work is currently profiled in the media. The public are invited to vote for the women who they believe to be the most deserving of winning in each category.

The finalists:

Esme Singleton is a professional nurse who has improved the quality of life of hundreds of people infected or affected by HIV/AIDS for the past three years in the rural town of Molteno, part of the smallest municipality in the Eastern Cape, Inkwanca

The work done by Singleton and her team at the Molteno Clinic is an example of how a well-functioning healthcare facility can bring strategic solutions and relief not only now but in the future in the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The community in which she works has an unemployment rate of over 90%. It is a poverty-stricken area where social problems such as multiple concurrent partners and alcohol abuse is rife. The scale of HIV/Aids infection is staggering and telling of why the fight against this disease must be a national priority.

Three years ago only 30 patients in Molteno hospital were on Anti-Retroviral (ARV) treatment and adherence to treatment was low but today 551 patients are on the Molteno Clinic programme and their lives have dramatically improved. It has brought hope to the community.

Singleton and her team of a doctor, a pharmacist, councillors and nurse administrators started the project in 2007 and have implemented the rollout and continuation of HIV/Aids treatment with huge success.

The focus has been on patients' adherence to medication regimes taking into account their socio-economic status, ability to travel and pay for travel costs and their general state of health. Patients have been fast tracked and also offered a range of service such as to initially prepare HIV Positive patients and on-going counseling. This has increased the number of patients going on ARV treatment and also the adherence rate remarkably.

Singleton has also not only focused on the in-clinic treatment but also goes that extra mile to help patients by doing home visits, organizing food parcels, disability pensions and grants. She even assists in helping patients to get identification documents to be able to qualify for these benefits.

Her vision is to grow the clinic further, establish a clinic in the neighbouring town of Sterkstroom, start a soup kitchen and give holistic care to those people living with HIV/Aids. She is the epitome of what all professional nurses should be - knowledgeable, kind, compassionate, generous and optimistic.

Frances Hartley is a grandmother who started work as a domestic worker and in her late thirties moved on to work in a clothing factory where as a shop steward she devoted her life to help and better the circumstances and future of her fellow workers after she saw the devastation of the HIV/Aids pandemic.

Hartley worked diligently to first educate herself about the illness, gender equality, labour and chronic diseases before she went out to teach other workers how they can prevent getting infected, help themselves and stop the devastation of this disease to the nation and its future.

Over many years she reached out to thousands of workers associated with the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu). She was a strong leader of the trade union's HIV/AIDS initiative and worked diligently with all affiliates to create awareness amongst workers and employees.

She single-handedly raised the level of consciousness of many Cosatu activists to understand the need for more deliberate action in responding to the disease and played a central role in training and mentoring others. Hartley championed Cosatu on an on-going basis to raise their profile in this regard and to make a strong call for action.

It was important for her to raise the nation's awareness about the high rate of HIV/AIDS infection and she worked not only through her trade union but also with other community organisations to breakdown the stigma associated with the illness.

Her extensive training helped her to train others to become peer educators in the Treatment Action Campaign. She also assisted churches and health services to reach workers in factories infected by HIV/AIDS with a message of hope.

In Cosatu Hartley was recognised as a driving force in the HIV/AIDS campaign and today even in her retirement she continues to spread the message by assisting younger trainers to work amongst workers in factories. She also continues to mentor trainers in churches and communities.

Hartley was an elected leader amongst workers during her working days and always acted fairly and served the workers she represented voluntarily. She was and continues to be an inspiration to the working class people as a working class mom whose husband died at an early age and who had to raise her children on her own while working in the clothing company and then went on to campaign HIV/AIDS to help change the destiny of workers.

Sister Jane Munyadziwa Dzebu is a dedicated professional nurse who has rekindled hope for healing while delivering

world-class and pioneering nursing care for women who are treated for gynaecological cancers at the Charlotte Maxeke-Johannesburg Hospital.

She heads the gynaecology cold case intake ward, Ward 196, at this state hospital which offers expertise and a multi-disciplinary approach as a tertiary service to patients with complex conditions which can't be treated elsewhere.

Her work in this ward is an example of how South Africa's health facilities can be restored to formidable levels in the public sector with professionals (nurse practitioners and medical practitioners) backing their profession in deeds and action.

Ward 196 is a model of nursing care where exceptional standards are maintained and highly motivated staff work under the leadership of Sr Dzebu. She mentors and teaches those working with her and senior students from all over the SADC region, who also receive medical exposure from the work done in this ward.

Sr Dzebu has worked hard and obtained a Master's Degree in Nursing Science from UNISA to give total care to the patients irrespective of circumstances. She imparts this knowledge and practical skills daily. Her handling of post-operative complications is excellent and medical staff frequently turns to her for advice and guidance on caring for wounds.

In her opinion health professionals should also be health educators wherever they are and share their expertise and knowledge with a broader audience. She gives health education at various forums and has delivered papers at both National and International Nurses Conferences.

Sr Dzebu has always believed that healthy women make a healthy nation. It is her vision to have knowledgeable women and girl-children who will be conversant and vocal in South Africa. This will enable them to stand-up for themselves and seek medical health aid without hindrances.

The work Sr Dzebu is doing in this Uro- Gynae-Oncology Academic Ward of the University of the Witwatersrand Medical School has had a huge impact on the recuperation and care of women and girl-children patients over the past 20 years and will continue to do in the future.

The award culminates with a gala evening in July 2010 at Emperors Palace in Gauteng to announce the winners. This event will be broadcast during prime time on Monday, 9 August 2010 on MNet.

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