

Telephone hotline extends a lifeline in dark times

 By [Katja Hamilton](#)

23 Jun 2022

Cipla broke the Guinness World Record with the "largest Socks Sentence" [challenge](#) in which 5,600 socks were donated by its staff and students of Curro Brackenfell to spell out the sentence #ItsOkNotToBeOk.

The previous largest sock sentence consisted of 2,295 socks and was accomplished by a sock company in Osaka, Japan, on 9 November 2020.

Chief executive officer of Cipla South Africa, Paul Miller, speaks to why this project is so important in raising awareness of prioritising mental-health care among SA's youth.



Source: Supplied. Chief executive officer of Cipla South Africa, Paul Miller.

■ ***To help raise awareness around mental health, Cipla South Africa broke the Guinness World Record for the 'largest sock sentence' challenge, held on the Sea Point promenade in Cape Town on Saturday 4 June 2022. Why was this project so important? Can you tell me a little about your hotline.***

Paul Miller: The South African Depression and Anxiety Group and Cipla launched a dedicated Cipla Sadag mental health helpline (0800 456 789) in 2018. The helpline is manned by a team of trained SADAG counsellors. When the line experiences peak times, the number of counsellors on call will increase to meet this demand.

The reason why this project is so important is because we want people to know that it's OK not to be OK, and that there is hope and there is help, which is why we launched the dedicated Cipla Sadag mental health helpline in 2018.

The helpline aims to assist the public with mental health - to cope with personal stress, mental illness, and other emotional issues, and is open seven days a week, 24 hours a day offering free telephonic counselling, information, and referrals to callers nationwide for a variety of mental-health issues. The Cipla mental health helpline receives between 9,000 to 9,500 calls a month.

■ ***According to the World Health Organization, suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among 15 to 29-year-olds. Why is this? Why are our youth in particular so vulnerable? What are the challenges in particular that SA youth face?***

Miller: The youth are faced with many challenges that contribute to depression and suicidal thoughts. These include relationship issues, problems at home, family crises, divorce, untreated trauma and a lack of support. The youth are the most at-risk age group and are at an age for onset of many mental illnesses, too. The hormonal changes that young people face also contributes to mental-health difficulties.

■ ***How does the high youth unemployment play into the above SA figure?***

Miller: Unemployment and poverty are affecting the South African youth's mental health. The South African youth are being confronted increasingly by pressures such as high unemployment, poverty rates, zero to no access to mental healthcare and a major lack of access to quality education which often negatively affects their mental health.

■ ***If there were one thing, you'd want youth to know about depression, what would that be?***

Miller: Sadag is dedicated to promoting the mental health and psychological wellbeing of all youth in South Africa by creating awareness and ensuring that all young people get access to mental-health help and support.



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These kinds of resources are critical for their health and wellbeing during challenging times, especially adolescence and early adulthood.

If a young person or a friend is feeling hopeless, alone or struggling to cope, we encourage them to please contact Sadag's toll-free suicide helpline on 0800 567 567 or 0800 21 22 23 for free telephonic counselling, crisis intervention, information and referrals seven days a week. They can also sms 31393 and a counsellor will call back or visit www.sadag.org for more resources and information.

■ ***Breaking the stigma around speaking about mental health would mean.....what to you?***

Miller: Awareness around mental health is of vital importance to Cipla, considering the scope of the problem. We felt the need to start a conversation around mental health.

We embarked on a campaign roughly three years ago, to let people know that it's OK not to be OK, and there is hope and

help available.

We wanted to not only create awareness but close the loop in terms of providing a valuable resource for people who needed help, hence we sponsor a Sadag helpline which offers free counselling.

■ ***Will Cipla be hosting another 'Largest Sock Sentence' next year?***

Miller: At this stage, we cannot comment about hosting another sock sentence. We're constantly trying to come up with fresh ideas to create awareness, so won't necessarily repeat the same idea.

■ ***How do you feel about this year's win?***

Miller: We're really pleased about breaking the Guinness World record – especially because we used old socks for this record attempt, so it aligns with our sustainability objectives too, while creating awareness and dialogue around mental health.

ABOUT KATJA HAMILTON

Katja is the Finance, Property and Healthcare Editor at Bizcommunity.

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