



PRESIDENTIAL ANNUAL REPORT
SASA AGM: 6TH APRIL 2024

COMPILED BY CAROLINE CORBETT

“SMART Decisions for a sustainable Society”

Our AGM has taken on a new standalone space this year in our calendar as our SASA Annual Congress is amalgamated into the All Africa Anaesthesia Congress (AAAC2024) hosted by our fantastic LOC in Gauteng, in September. This is an extremely exciting event and the first time SASA will have the privilege of convening such a prestigious congress. The flexibility of administration, the dynamic agility of organization, and the national collaboration that has enabled this shift is a magnificent example of the innate ability of our Society and its membership to innovate. Thank you to everyone who has enabled this calendar shift and embraced the change!

2023-2024 has been another exciting year for SASA with our administrative and operational structures undergoing a phenomenal metamorphosis. Lezelle Britz, our CEO, has grown our national Secretariat into a formidable team of staff whose commitment and dedication to their jobs extends well beyond their expected occupational scope. The movement and restructuring of SASA into a Unitary Structure have consumed much of their time in ensuring that we are able to transition into this much improved space with confidence, comfort, and fiduciary compliance.

The visionary SMART structure outlined in the CEO’s Report is a culmination of the review and revision of what we hope to build going forward in SASA and our national membership and international footprint. As Lezelle reminds us in quoting our mission, “SASA empowers, supports and enables our members to practice the profession of anaesthesiology optimally, to create and facilitate opportunities to optimise the environment that our members practice in, resulting in a strong, cohesive and inclusive profession of anaesthesia that collectively, through our strength of voice, leads, advocates for and enables our members to improve healthcare for South Africa”, and I am incredibly excited to welcome the new SMART structure in enabling this mission.

Our Business Units have been extremely busy navigating the ever-changing landscape of the South African healthcare sectors. As the President I have represented both public sector and private sector on multiple forums internally and externally as the Office of the SASA President continues to hold a reputation that demands regular attendance and input outside of just our Council and membership responsibilities. With 2024 being a national and provincial government election year in May, the political landscape in the country is volatile at best. The impact of this is palpable and our membership has

certainly been impacted by this in various ways. I have used my position to represent the best interests of our SASA membership, the profession, patient safety, and healthcare nationally at every opportunity. We were privileged enough to have an additional SASA Past President, Prof Lundgren, be successfully nominated and elected to join Prof Rantloane on the Medical and Dental Board of the HPCSA this year as well. This has certainly assisted me in connecting the HPCSA board directly to membership and our leadership through their representation here. Stakeholder networking has often required collaboration and engagement with other national bodies, as SASA and the position of the President still hold many significant stakeholder seats within the health sector. Engagement has included presentations, panel discussions, negotiations, and request for input at national and provincial level regarding:

- The National Health Insurance Bill
- MMed accreditation and registrar training
- Culpable homicide & the criminalisation of healthcare workers
- Medicolegal Indemnity, case lifecycle, inquests & inquiries
- Mediation & peer review
- MO, registrar, & Internship post availability
- Nurse training & scope of practice
- Stakeholder & facility group contracting
- HPCSA ethical rules, regulations, sanctions, & administration

On an international stakeholder and engagement level, I have continued to represent the Society on presidential engagement forums both with our Common Issues Group colleagues from the US, Canada, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand. I have also extended my connections to those valuable role players identified in leadership structures within the World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists and its member societies. I am a very firm believer that not only do we all share patients and problems globally in anaesthesia and healthcare, but we must also share solutions. Connecting with leadership and structures beyond those within our own borders remains vital to ensuring that we can authentically offer universal access to quality healthcare. Mentorship in my leadership capacity has been of huge value in my tenure as President, and many of the challenges I have faced have been brought to the drawing board for discussion by global leadership mentors with whom I have invested in relationship building and networking over the years. These discussions, shared troubleshooting, collective input, and different lived experience and approaches to problem solving have afforded me invaluable diversity of insight into leadership and management.

Our Special Interest Groups and Committees have seen significant restructuring and some exciting developments as each convener and team have paved the way for new educational material, membership diversification, and change. Of special mention is the incredible impact already achieved by Gwen Morgan and our new Sustainability Committee, a structure that has been long overdue in its establishment at SASA and that is sky rocketing in advocacy and creation of environmental impact awareness already under Gwen's leadership. I have no doubt that the new conveners and chairs of the SIG's and committees who will be elected following this AGM will continue to build

on these exciting platforms, especially with 10 new WFSA Committee members from SASA having been successfully nominated and then elected onto the WFSA Committees. These global connections will continue to enhance and intensify the depth of membership offering and patient and structural impact that each SIG and committee is ultimately able to deliver on.

I have been invited to represent SASA in collaborating with the South African Health Business Academy (SAHBA) as a founding faculty member in order to assist in creating anaesthesia-specific wellness, practice structure, and practice management educational content as a long term vision for SASA membership. In order to offer membership a broader base of input and a more holistic approach to their career in both limited and full private practice, as well as address how else the new HPCSA ethical rule amendments may impact our space, this faculty role and involvement with SAHBA has offered significant insight into different business and personal support structures available nationally.

Following the presentation of the unamended NHI Bill to the National Council of Provinces in November 2023, SASA collaborated with 8 other membership societies and associations within the health sector and became a founding member of the South African Health Professionals' Collaboration. This organisation now offers a unique collective representative voice to over 25000 healthcare workers nationally. In view of the significant impact that national government has had on the healthcare sector, especially since the Covid pandemic years, it was unanimously felt amongst these groups that a unified voice on issues faced by all GP's, dentists, allied health workers, and specialists would be of far greater impact in its narrative that attempting to engage national and provincial governments separately. SASA is an excellent and powerful example of the strength offered by a collective. In November we formally contracted a PR company, produced and published a national media statement on the NHI Bill and our core concerns, and after the adoption of the unamended Bill by the NCoP in November, we embarked on an intensive national public awareness campaign within the media to inform both healthcare workers and the greater South African citizenship of risks posed by the Bill in its current format.

We have subsequently submitted a formal petition on behalf of the SAHPC membership to the President, appealing to him to submit the NHI Bill to the Constitutional Court for review or resubmit the Bill to Parliament for review in light of the specifically identified and unaddressed concerns relating to both legal process and constitutional rights infringements. SASA's role here and the role of the SASA President as leadership has been critical to the specific representation of membership nationally, as well as in ensuring that the goals of both health reform and the ultimate achievement of sustainable universal access to quality healthcare are actually achieved.

Our member value proposition has been further enhanced this past year not just through the numerous offerings of our SASA National Council structures, but also through direct leadership negotiation with relevant stakeholders and invitation to represent membership. Some of these new bespoke SASA membership privileges are noted in:

- Renegotiation of increased MPS membership discount to happen in April 2024
- SASA representation on SAHPC as well as being a founding member society
- SASA representation & significant membership discount with SAHBA
- Direct engagement with the DDG's for Health and NHI, as well as shadow minister for Health in order to resolve or comment on specific issues pertaining to membership and the escalation of these for discussion at Parliament
- Successful initial engagement with the SALRC on the issue of HCW criminalisation

As SASA continues to grow and organically expand its membership, the most important aspect to invest in will be membership wellness and workforce wellbeing. Over the past year our membership and greater anaesthetic community has suffered extreme losses in the passing of more colleagues and friends. Some of these tragedies were wellness related and a loss for one is a collective loss for all. We cannot afford to deny the grave occupationally imposed dangers we face as anaesthetists, in South Africa specifically. We are at risk of burnout, of substance abuse, and of suicide. Our friends, colleagues, staff, and teams are also therefore at risk, and ultimately so are our patients. In not actively and openly discussing these issues, in being honest about our trauma and our risk thereof, we fail to achieve even our most basic vision and mission at SASA. And we fail each other.

The year has again demonstrated our gross vulnerability to internal and external stressors, and this, combined with the stigma still associated with impaired mental health will continue to result in membership deaths. I implore you as your outgoing SASA President, and as someone who has called, commiserated, cried, and attempted to offer comfort to every single one of the families of the members and colleagues whom we have lost, to please take care of yourselves mentally, emotionally, and physically. Please acknowledge your risk, identify your stressors, ask for help early, be the one who intervenes or even reports a friend if they cannot do so for themselves but need to, and above all – please be honest with yourselves about the need to connect to support structures that can assist you before it is too late. We cannot survive this alone. Wellness is a team sport, and by ignoring this truth, we become our own patients and potentially our own casualties.

And so, in closing this report, I thank the SASA Exco, the Council, its past Presidents, our membership, and the Secretariat for each one of your individual and collective support of me during my time as SASA President. Thank you to your families with whom we share you and who make many of the sacrifices with you as you serve our membership. I also note, with intense sincerity, my gratitude to our CEO, Lezelle, who has been my compass, my conduit, my wingman, and my pilot in many instances over my tenure. I could not have successfully achieved what we have without your wisdom, expertise, and wealth of experience. I have been afforded the opportunity to serve and to grow well beyond my perceived limitations and to embrace challenges, obstacles, and hardship with the knowledge that I have an army of insight in all of you beside me. I celebrate the SASA culture of direct opinion sharing, constructive criticism, authentic engagement and, even when this culture invites conflict, the firm foundation of mutual respect on which such conflict is resolved.

SASA is a living, breathing, working, dynamically evolving community and I have been so incredibly proud to represent you as your President. Your incoming Executive, newly elected leadership, and the rich base of existing membership and alumni are the roots that will continue to grow SASA above and beyond any future obstacles in South Africa.

To quote a favourite author of mine, Dr Seuss:

“Unless someone like you cares an awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not.”

SASA has the ability to continue to shape the healthcare sector in South Africa for the betterment of Society and for the greater good of all citizens. But it needs commitment from you, its membership to do so. Make SMART decisions. Our sustainability, and our continued positive impact and contribution rely on each of you to create them and to defend them.

Thank you to every one of you for supporting and enabling my leadership in this space and for continuing to carry the baton forwards!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Caroline Corbett', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Caroline Corbett
SASA President
2022-2024