



MOTIVATION FOR DIETETIC AND NUTRITION SERVICES AND WHY THEY ARE CRITICAL WITHIN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC – 26 MARCH 2020

As the coronavirus (COVID-19) continues to spread through South Africa, the Association for Dietetics in South Africa (ADSA) and South African Society for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition (SASPEN) wish to highlight the importance of nutrition care during this critical time, and even more so for patients with infections.

During the Presidential Address to the nation on Monday 23rd of March 2020, President Ramaphosa stated that malnourished individuals are particularly at risk of disease. The continuously high TB and HIV disease burden, together with a worrisomely high burden of undernutrition in children clearly indicates the vulnerability of the South African population at all ages. It furthermore highlights the need for nutrition interventions to prevent and treat malnutrition at population, individual and hospital level.

It is anticipated that critical care and hospital occupancy will increase over the short to medium term, with resultant increased requirements for essential nutritional care and support. The severe and critically ill COVID-19 patients are at high nutritional risk and will require careful dietetic input such as enteral or parenteral nutrition support. The dietitian, as member of the multidisciplinary team, is the only health care professional with the knowledge and skills to plan, implement and monitor the most appropriate nutrition regime for the critically ill patient to ensure outcome benefit and patient safety. The COVID-19 situation will also likely increase the demand for food services at hospitals and field-sites. Dietetic and nutritional care can decrease mortality, infectious and non-infectious complications, reduce length of hospital stay, decrease hospital readmissions and increase quality of life. All of these which will in itself have an impact on the patient's cost of care.

In light of the critical importance of dietetic and nutrition services in the current circumstances, we strongly urge recognition of dietetic and nutrition professionals as critical services at health facilities. As health professionals our priority remains to respect the President's announcement of the 21-day lock-down and all other government directives that will follow. We respect the gravity of the global and the local COVID-19 situation and will take all steps necessary to help flatten the curve.

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