



A word from SASPEN on COVID-19

In light of our President's speech last night and the nation wide lockdown that is to commence from Thursday, 26 March midnight, herewith a word to our members, many of whom are essential health care workers who will have to continue treating patients during this difficult time at facilities ranging from private and government hospitals to clinics and private practices.

For many healthcare professionals the end goal is saving lives but one should not forget about the impact of nutritional status and nutrition care on the outcomes of our patients, and the role that we as advocates of nutrition care are to play. The patients most at risk to major threats and risks arising from related malnutrition are the elderly, those with comorbidities and those with compromised immune systems. We also know that patients surviving acute complications through long ICU stays will face further worsening nutritional status or new onset of malnutrition and wasting.

During the next weeks we will face a difficult time that will affect both health care professionals and patients alike.

For you, the healthcare worker, one cannot overemphasize that you should look after yourselves and take the necessary measures whilst treating your patients. Consult your facility on the necessary precautionary measures that were put in place. The following links can provide more information:

<https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/keeping-the-coronavirus-from-infecting-health-care-workers>

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance/health-workers>

Just as the services of healthcare workers are considered essential for patients, it is also essential to ensure that we follow best practices in nutritional care to improve our patients' outcomes. ESPEN is currently putting the finishing touches to a document, entitled ESPEN PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR NUTRITIONAL MANAGEMENT OF

INDIVIDUALS WITH SARS-CoV-2 INFECTION. Although there are obviously no studies yet available on nutritional treatment of COVID-19 patients, ESPEN has decided to provide suggestions for nutritional management in this setting based on extrapolation from available evidence and recommendations. The main sources for this document are the existing ESPEN guidelines with specific reference to the ICU, as well as geriatric and home care guidelines. In the meantime, fully available educational material from the ESPEN Lifelong Learning Programme LLL can also be found online and downloadable at [lllnutrition.com](http://nutrition.com), and you can also consult the ESPEN guidelines at <https://www.espen.org/guidelines-home/espen-guidelines> .

As soon as the practical guidance document is available, the link will be made available on all SASPEN social media platforms. One should always take into consideration though that these guidelines were drawn up taking the European resources and populations into consideration, which can differ widely from our own situation.

The COVID-19 pandemic is posing unprecedented challenges and threats to patients and healthcare systems worldwide with a possibility of also doing so in our own country if the measures put in place should fail. I would like to use this opportunity to ensure you of SASPEN's commitment to provide support and guidance during this time but considering the current situation SASPEN will refrain from any face-to-face activities (e.g. PM ward rounds as communicated earlier as well as any live LLL courses). We will also keep you updated on the status of the upcoming CCSSA/SASPEN congress of 2020.

For more information on COVID-19 in South Africa, please consult the Department of Health Covid-19 online resource & news portal at <https://sacoronavirus.co.za/>.

I leave you with these words from our President's address last night:

I call on all of us, one and all, to play our part.

To be courageous, to be patient, and above all, to show compassion.

Let us never despair.

For we are a nation at one, and we will surely prevail.

May God protect our people.

Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika. Morena boloka setjhaba sa heso.

God seën Suid-Afrika. God bless South Africa.

Mudzimu fhatutshedza Afurika. Hosi katekisa Afrika.

Vanessa Kotzé

SASPEN President (2019 – 2021)