

**CONFERENCE REPORT: INTERNATIONAL MILITARY
NURSING CONFERENCE
St Georges Hotel, Johannesburg, South Africa,
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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The 1st International Military Nursing Conference hosted by the South African Military Health Service (SAMHS) under the command of the Surgeon General (SG) of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), was held in Johannesburg with the theme “**Military Nursing as a Catalyst in Support of Military Medicine, a National Asset within the SAMHS**”. Delegates included healthcare workers of various categories from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Region and the African Union (AU). The aim of the conference was to determine and clarify the extensive role and functions of nurses in the SAMHS, as military nursing officers in the department of defence (DOD) in order to affirm military nurses as an asset for the country.

The objectives of the conference were to:

- define and clarify the strategic position of South African military nurses within the country.
- clarify the scope of practice and role of military nurse in terms of the dual responsibility as a nursing practitioner, a nursing officer and a non-commissioned officer of the SANDF.
- benchmark with military nurses from other countries.
- develop the career for military nurses that will be recorded and recognised by the government.
- develop and promote a special working relationship as military nurses with the SADC and AU countries.
- present clinical nursing papers supporting the theme of the conference.
- promote the image of SAMHS and the DOD.

OVERVIEW OF THE CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Each day was linked to a sub-theme and presenters delivered papers related to this sub-theme in support of the objectives of the conference. Presentations conducted on the first day after the opening address by Lieutenant General V. J. Ramlakan included “*Setting the scene*” by the Director of Military nursing, followed by a presentation on the history of military nursing presented by Colonel T. Ligthelm. “*The military nurse in deployment*” and “*Primary health care approach to military nursing*” were sub-themes for second and third day respectively. The keynote address for the third day was titled “*What makes occupational health and safety (OHS) critical in Military nursing.*” It was presented by Colonel Lindiwe Nkoko, a senior staff officer, health specialist for the joint directorate OHS in the DOD. I was privileged to be the only external presenter at this conference. My presentation which took place on the fourth day of the conference, under the sub-theme “*Educating the military nurse*” was based on original research conducted among student nurses of a medical University in South Africa. The study aimed at preventing needle prick injuries among health care workers and to promote their health and safety during patient care, which was in line with one of conference objectives. My presentation described high risk factors for needle prick injuries and provided recommendations for preventative injection safety interventions/measures.

Other interesting and informative presentations included “*The role of nursing in driving military research*” by Colonel (Dr) Chris Naidoo, a chief specialist maxillofacial surgeon and academic head of research of Phidisa project. In his presentation he emphasised the importance of military nurses to be involved in clinical research in order to improve health care service delivery within the military context and also to foster and promote collaboration with institutions of higher education (Universities) and research institutions like the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and the Medical Research Council (MRC).

Major Constance Sekgobela, a counsellor at the SAMHS nursing college, did a presentation on “*Pregnancy-related challenges encountered by student nurses at the SAMHS nursing college.*” The fourth day was ended in style with a gala dinner in the evening.

CONCLUSION

The last day of the conference focused on the summary of the conference presentations, the launch of the Military Nursing Association of South Africa (MNASAs), conference closure and a SADC workshop in which all inputs were gathered to compile a resolution in support of the objectives of the conference.

Acknowledgements

I was honoured and privileged to be invited to participate in this important event and to share my research findings, and I would like to thank Unisa for affording me the opportunity to attend this valuable conference.