

GALA DINNER SPEECH

I am delighted to share a message of support from the Cancer Association of South Africa.

Last year, we celebrated our 90th anniversary. From small beginnings in 1931, CANSA grew and evolved throughout the years to what it is today. It's thanks to numerous partnerships, many donations, and the utmost dedication and perseverance of employees and volunteers throughout these 90 years, that CANSA is the leader today.

And we've always had a HEART for supporting cancer research. CANSA is one of the only non-profit organisations conducting cancer research in South Africa to date. We have a proud portfolio of research over the last 20 years and during that time, CANSA was one of the largest local funders of cancer research. Since 1994, 255 researchers from 12 academic institutions were funded by CANSA. We've managed over 110 projects that resulted in 302 publications.

Like Pan African Cancer Research Institute, we're very concerned about the lack of cancer awareness and education that can result in many cancers being presented at very late stages. We all know that an early diagnosis means a better and successful treatment outcome with improved survival rates. We are also like you want to address the inequalities in the health systems in underserved and socio-economically disadvantaged communities.

CANSA revised our research strategy in 2020 to play a better strategic role in funding research on priority cancers in South Africa. We align with and support the National Department of Health's strategy on cancer control including formulating health policy. We focus from epidemiology and determinants of the burden of cancer, on health seeking behaviours to improve early detection to health, and to relieve the economic burden of cancer. As well as research relating to cancer biology.

Our Association acknowledges the importance of building the capacity of a new generation of cancer researchers to further develop much-needed advances in cancer research country-wide.

Our funded research has yielded significant findings, such as the identification of Hepatitis B infection as a major risk factor for liver cancer. In 2015, CANSA honoured Professor Michael Kew with a Lifetime Achievement Award to recognise his contribution, knowledge and understanding of primary liver cancer. Thanks to his work, a link between Hepatitis B and liver cancer was discovered, followed by the development of a vaccine that was incorporated into the South African government's infant immunisation programme. CANSA is proud to have been a funder of Prof Kew's research for over 30 years.

We play a large role in educating the consumer about leading a smart, balanced lifestyle and reducing the cancer risk. Since 2010, we have our CANSA Seal of Recognition programme with Smart Choice labels that are awarded to products that qualify, in five categories. These are products that have been assessed to contain no known carcinogens and help to lower the cancer risk. This programme would not be possible without evidence-based research.

Our track record further includes supporting correct food labelling on products, especially of trans fatty acids based on scientific findings.

We recognise that to survive in the current challenging climate, we need strong partnerships that will help us to reach our mission and objectives. You have our full support representing civil society and thousands of people affected by cancer. Together we can contribute significantly to Research required to provide the latest evidence on cancer surveillance, prevention, screening, diagnosis and treatment to inform our policies, cancer prevention and control plans and resource allocation to tackle this disease.

Long-term collaborative research efforts are needed to eliminate duplication and to coordinate optimum investment of resources. Cancer research requires a national strategy for an integrated, multi-disciplinary focussed approach to combat this disease. And it is in this regard that I challenge the PACRI to take up a leading role in Africa for cancer research.

Together, the biggest breakthroughs and world class projects can happen, through our shared values and partnership. And especially in the fields of oncology and service to cancer patients.

We look forward to Defeating Cancer Together!