

Rural doctor of the year 2007

The Pierre Jaques Award for the 2007 rural doctor of the year was presented to Dr Gert Marincowitz at the Rural Health conference in Badplaas on 23 August 2007. The award is presented to a rural doctor, working at the coal face. The person is judged by the RuDASA Committee to have made a significant contribution towards rural health. The award is a RuDASA initiative in cooperation with the South African Academy of Family Practice/Primary Care and the South African Medical Association.

Gert Marincowitz has worked in the Tzaneen area for the past 16 years where he is committed to the public health primary care clinics. Being fluent in the Tsonga language, he is known as 'the white shangaan doctor' in the Mogudeni Grace Health Centre where he never misses his weekly day of consultations.

Gert is the driving force behind the start of Antiretroviral Treatment in this clinic; it is the first and only primary care site providing ART in the public health system in Limpopo. Within six months of its opening, 500 patients have received treatment in this very remote site.

Of even more importance, is the way in which this ART clinic came into existence. Faithful to his belief that the participation of patients in their own healthcare is an important healing factor, he has worked on a principle of shared decision making from the start and included all stakeholders in founding the ART clinic. From 2004 onward, PLWHA, nurses, community care givers, lay counsellors and managers had regular meetings to discuss the best possible care for people living with HIV. The PLWHA were chosen as representatives from an active support group of more than 70 people. The on-site training of nurses, and the development of clinic guidelines and other tools were all parts of what has become a model for developing and implementing a Wellness and ART program at the primary care level.

The bottom-up approach contributes to commitment and a feeling of ownership among all stakeholders. This approach has proven crucial for sustainability and this is how Gert has helped to transform Mogudeni Grace's ART site into a well-oiled machine.

As a leader who modestly follows, Gert is an example for public health primary care.

The award was named after Dr Pierre Jaques, a founder-member of RuDASA and a doyen of rural practice in South Africa. Dr Jaques spent most of his working life at Elim Hospital in rural Limpopo and has been a tireless advocate for rural health and the role of the rural doctor in South Africa. He passed away two weeks before the conference, and will be fondly remembered by many rural health workers.

Rudasa conference, 23 August 2007