



**Rural Doctor's Association of Southern Africa**

*"Inspiring others to rural health"*

## **Rural Doctor of the Year Award Winners 2021**

### **Dr Michaela Lotz and Dr John-D Lotz**

We, the clinical team at Madwaleni District Hospital, would like to nominate Dr John-D and Michaela Lotz, as a couple, for the rural doctor of the year award.



At Madwaleni Hospital on the deeply rural Wild Coast of Mbhashe sub-district (Eastern Cape) we are always looking for another "power couple" to join the clinical staff. The basic definition is a two-person team of health care professionals who are invested in rural health and only take up one accommodation space! John-D and Michaela are the gold standard rural "power couple". They arrived in Madwaleni in 2014 as two post-community service medical officers and have planted their roots deep into Madwaleni soil, contributing integrally to its growth.

Both John-D (JD) and Michaela have a joint special interest and passion in Paediatrics and Infectious Diseases and have worked incredibly hard in uplifting aspects of these services at Madwaleni. JD has excelled as an almost-qualified Family Physician through the Walter Sisulu University Family Medicine training platform. He has grown the decentralised MDR TB unit at Madwaleni into a centre of excellence and trained up other medical officers and clinical associates in the process. He has fully invested in the concept of quality improvement and is constantly looking to apply and teach the theory to the betterment of Madwaleni and its community. John-D is in the process of publishing his Masters in Medicine (Family Medicine) on an extensive cross sectional study assessing DR-TB outcomes of patients on short course regimens at Madwaleni and Zithulele Hospital, which is an incredible example of excellence in rural research and will do wonders to the body of evidence on DR-TB in South Africa. In the last year JD has played a pivotal role in setting up and overseeing our hospital's COVID response. This has been a massive undertaking and has undoubtedly led to countless lives saved. This has needed an incredible skill set that only JD has been able to provide which includes systems establishment and management, quality improvement analysis, medical insight, working remarkably well with multiple different teams on multiple different levels and platforms, resource management and recruitment etc. He has advocated strongly for access to vaccines in rural settings

leading to Zithulele and Madwaleni being vaccine sites and has helped coordinate all the vaccine oversight logistics including recruiting Community health workers and arranging transport for staff from all over the sub-district.

Michaela has shown a special interest in the area of child health, becoming the paediatric and neonatal guru of Madwaleni Hospital, achieving the equivalent of a full day's work whilst in a five-eighths post. She was integral in designing and launching Madwaleni's neonatal high care and KMC unit which now provides excellent neonatal care to the community and takes the strain off the over-burdened referral hospital. In conjunction with the multi-disciplinary team, she has implemented crucial breast-feeding friendly initiatives at the hospital which are already shown great success. She has also more recently been overseeing the whole child health service of our hospital, which includes all aspects of ward, clinic, OPD, rehabilitation work; as well as statistics (CHIP), systems and training. Michaela is currently completing her post graduate diploma in Child health through UCT. She has worked to partner with the rehabilitation team to ensure doctor support and presence is provided to the paediatric clinics (CP, SAM, T21 and high-risk baby clinic) run by the rehabilitation team. Moreover, following a pilot study done by Michaela and the physiotherapist (who was presented with the RuReSA Award at the rural health conference in 2019), they have developed the Qhawekazi breastfeeding mother-mentor programme through the Layita foundation. This program was initiated in August 2019 to improve appropriate breastfeeding outcomes by providing support and information to mothers in the community.

Over and above their direct involvement in the hospital, John-D and Michaela are active community members serving in multiple different areas of life here. They both sit as board members on the local non-profit organisation: The Layita Foundation which founded in 2014, assisting on the growth and decision making since 2015. JD sits on the Board of Governors of Masikhule, an early childhood development centre founded initially to support children of those who work within the hospital premises (including grounds staff, clinical staff, nursing staff and general workers), his role on the board has been specifically assisting in its growth and direction, and more recently overseeing renovations and maintenance developments as well as interviews and vision for the project. Michaela and JD serve on the leadership team of Madwaleni Church, and Michaela has been committed to faithfully running the children's church programme since 2015 with patience and dedication.

In the years since, Madwaleni has benefitted from the sense of stability they have brought to our hospital. Arriving in turmoil, they gently found and poured themselves into gaps, sensitively providing support where it was most lacking. Without ever burning a bridge or digging in their heels, they have nudged the hospital forward, toward quality clinical care and improved services. Their time at the hospital has been marked by consistency and commitment, the currency that district hospitals trade in and are often so desperate for.

In summary, Dr Michaela and Dr John-D Lotz are the definition of the ultimate rural "power couple" and worthy joint recipients of the Pierre Jaques Rural Doctor of the Year award for 2021. It is a privilege to work and live with such good friends. To be able to rely on their support and presence has created an environment for growth for the hospital community.