

What our medical professionals need now

The decision to enter the healthcare profession is never taken lightly. In fact, most individuals who choose to work as a medical practitioner or specialist nurse will talk of an internal calling to do this kind of work. Yet, as the third wave of COVID-19 reaches its peak in South Africa, many medical practitioners are feeling tempted to leave the profession. Here's why they shouldn't.

By Vanessa Rogers on behalf of Indwe Risk Services (Authorised FSP 3425) and MC De Villiers Brokers (Authorised FSP 7241)

The COVID-19 pandemic, which first reached our shores in March last year, has led to many doctors, nurses and their support staff encountering excessive workloads. Many feel frustrated that not only are they not working in the speciality in which they were trained, but the leadership from hospital administrators and government departments has been woefully inadequate. Furthermore, many are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. The need to return from work, strip off clothing and shower in a separate section of the house is a particularly harsh daily reality, before healthcare workers are able to greet partners and family members.

In fact, data coming through from the US reveals that between 20 and 30 percent of frontline healthcare workers say they are considering leaving the profession; while four in 10 (43 percent) of nurses are considering leaving their role – a figure that is higher in those who have been based in intensive care units (48 percent), the study found.

Not far off, in the UK, the British Medical Association found in a recent survey that 31 percent of medical professionals were choosing to retire early, while 25 percent were considering a career break and 17 percent said they would rather continue in their profession somewhere else in the world (even though the grass there may not necessarily be greener due to the way in which the COVID-19 strains keep evolving).

Bump in the road?

Among South African medical professionals, the burnout, excessive caseloads and pessimism have been as hectic as for their overseas colleagues – with the added factor of recent politically-inspired riots and incidents of looting, which have resulted in pandemic vaccination programmes being disrupted and even derailed.

But a piece on CNBC.com suggests that various factors should be considered before our highly qualified and valued healthcare workers make a radical change. These include the reward of serving a community and making a difference; the substantial personal investment one has made in becoming a doctor or nurse in the first place; and assessing beneficial ways to address any

challenging issues – from working shorter hours and reducing stress levels, to changing the way in which you do your work (say, moving from operating to lecturing, as just one example).

It is also worth considering the pay cut you may suffer when moving to another profession, the time needed off to upskill in the new line of work and how, overall, this may impact on your personal life and long-held goals.

Astute advice is to investigate every possible angle during a period of rest and respite (see restorative leave ideas below), rather than making a radical change without due consideration. Suggestions from the teams at Indwe Risk Services and MC de Villiers Brokers include:

investigating a reduction in your medical indemnity premium for a short period of leave when you may not, for example, be performing high-risk (or any) surgical procedures;

seeking counselling for various of the traumatic incidents you have witnessed during high-demand times of patient care;

checking whether South African Special Risks Insurance Association (Sasria) cover is provided to you in your medical indemnity cover or, if not, adding it (at minimal cost) via your broker;

seeking advice around the impact of disruption to your practice income during a Sasria event; and

watching out for any tell-tale signs of stress, anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder in both yourself, or your colleagues, so that you can seek help/refer them on for help sooner rather than later.

Unusual risks cover

SASRIA is the only non-life insurer which provides cover against unusual risks, such as civil commotion, public disorder, strikes, riots and terrorism, to individuals, businesses and government organisations which own assets in South Africa. Check in with your broker to make sure this cover is available to you going forward.

Restorative leave ideas

Walk the Camino de Santiago, or Way of Saint James, a pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela, a city in Galicia (Spain). <https://caminoways.com/all-you-need-to-know-to-walk-the-camino>

Go on a yoga retreat at one of the top yoga centres in India. <https://www.india.com/travel/articles/top-9-yoga-centres-in-india-that-will-leave-you-feeling-refreshed-3237147/>

Try out a mindfulness meditation course. <https://www.beingmindful.co.za/>

Sources:

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/31/covid-is-driving-an-exodus-among-health-care-workers.html>

<https://www.iol.co.za/business-report/opinion/state-owned-insurance-company-sasria-to-expedite-claims-for-businesses-destroyed-in-unrest-e8d92745-cb58-4ba2-b55d-e8dc67d4eaf5>

<https://www.sadag.org/>

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