



COV19 Doctors on Call: Coronavirus Helpline Program

Background

President Cyril Ramaphosa declared a State of Disaster, on 15th March 2020, related to the outbreak of Covid-19, in South Africa. Within less than 2 weeks of the first case, we are already past 240 cases and are witnessing rapid community-transmission. If South Africa follows the path of other countries, such as Italy and France, then we can expect the prevalence of Covid-19 to escalate quickly over the next 1-2 months, as the epidemic management principles are given time to 'flatten the curve'.

In addition the dangers of the pathogen, which is particularly infectious and deadly for the elderly or those with pre-existing conditions, this epidemic also threatens our entire health system, social infrastructure and national economy. The NICD has implemented strict guidelines for primary healthcare workers to manage the frontline of exposure. These guidelines include a defined diagnostic protocol, a clinical management algorithm and reporting framework.

The NICD has also recommended that concerned members of public contact their doctors first, rather than present at their surgeries, clinics or emergency rooms, in order to prevent further spread of the virus and infect frontline healthcare workers, which will further disable the healthcare system. Many people, particularly the uninsured, unemployed and vulnerable groups, don't have direct access to call a doctor, hence they are at greater risk. This program has been designed to help them.

Doctors on Call

The KwaZulu-Natal Doctors Healthcare Coalition (KZNDHC), in partnership with Usizo Advisory Solutions, have developed a not-for-profit program called 'Doctors on Call'. KZNDHC is an Independent Practice Association (IPA) group comprising of about 1000 doctors, which has served the province for over 23 years; and Usizo Advisory Solution is a consulting firm, with a dedicated Healthcare advisory practice led by Dr Anuschka Coovadia, which works to support health system challenges in our country and across the Continent.

Doctors on Call is a program which offers a free Covid-19 helpline, operating during the hours of 8am-5pm (Monday-Friday), manned by our dedicated community of doctors. Administered by a local call centre, all calls are received by a trained call centre agent, screened and then routed to a doctor-on-call, for advice related to Covid-19. The doctor network are training according to the national guidelines and provide advice according to the NICD guidelines.

All calls are documented and reported on. Referrals are made directly to the NICD for testing and results of the test will be captured on the Vula app. The output of the program will be reported daily on a dashboard and then collated at the end of the program.

Call to Action

Defeating this epidemic will require unprecedented support from all stakeholders in South Africa, both public and private. This support demonstrates good corporate citizenship and contributes towards protecting our employees, customers and the sustainability of business, in our country.

Your support for this program could help flatten the curve, save our health system from being overwhelmed, protect our economy and save lives.