Dear PATS Members and Family,

In this second edition of our newsletter for 2023, it is great to reflect on the last three months and to share with you some news of our organisation. Since welcoming our new executive members, I thought a new addition to our newsletter would be to introduce some of them to you in our new Who’s who section and you will meet A/Prof Charl Verwey and Dr Diana Marangu who are profiled in this edition.

As our society grows and we need to adapt to a changing world and keep up with technology, you will see that in the next few months our current website will receive a face-lift. Our new website will allow members to register and pay directly online for seamless registration. We also will be able to have our registered members have access to our now increasing number of resources from our burgeoning working groups.

Our Journal of the Pan African Thoracic Society has had a fantastic 3 years of growth under the leadership of Prof Obianuju Ozoh, as its time for her to hand over the reigns as the Editor-in-Chief. I would like to express our sincere appreciation to her for being the inaugural EIC for our journal and she is handing over the reigns to Prof Marco Zampoli who we warmly welcome as our new EIC. Marco has been an active member of PATS and has acted as an Associate Editor for the past 3 years. We look forward to Marco’s term and as our plans we hope as a next step to have our journal incorporated on a number of platforms to increase visibility and broaden access to our articles.

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Prof Heather Zar presented with an award by ERS president Prof Carlos Robalo Cordero

Prof Monica Gappa (incoming ERS president) Prof Heather Zar and Prof Refiloe Masekela representing PATS n Milan

Warm wishes,
Refiloe Masekela
President of Pan African Thoracic Society

With regards to our international collaborators and partners, PATS was represented at the European Respiratory Society (ERS) and I would like to congratulate our past-president Prof Heather Zar, who was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award in Paediatrics by ERS. We are very proud and appreciative of all the work she has done to advance Paediatric Lung Health in Africa and putting lung health issues of children in low to middle income countries on the global agenda.

Our British Thoracic Society (BTS) Global Lung Health short-term fellowship program continues our partnership and has awarded three placements from Africa who will be attending an upcoming 2023 BTS congress; Dr. Charles Batte from Uganda, Dr. Jacqueline Wanjiku Kagima from Kenya, and Dr. Nnamdi Ikechukwu Nwosu from Nigeria have all demonstrated exemplary dedication to advancing paediatric lung health in their respective countries.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that we had BTS fellowship awardees from the UK to Africa at our recent congress in Kenya. We would like to acknowledge the presence of Krishna Sivakumaran, Victoria Oyenuga, and Charlotte Carter from BTS, who graced the event with their insights and expertise.

We will be opening applications for PATS Mecor 2024 in the beginning of the year. This is after we have completed another successful PATS MECOR program in Nairobi with 45 students enrolled in the course. As usual we had a large number of excellent applicants and covered a broad range of research topics at the course. It is exciting to see that research areas that the MECOR students want to address ranging from acute to chronic respiratory diseases are all relevant to local context. Climate change and its impact on lung health is increasingly important especially for our largely vulnerable African continent. This is also reflected in the research questions that are being addressed and as a society we need to reflect on our own contribution to reducing our carbon footprint and ways to mitigate climate change.

As we approach World Lung Day on the 25th September, I would like to encourage us all to use the opportunity to highlight lung health issues in our countries. We have awarded 3 successful PALI grants for a number of projects in Nigeria, Gambia and Kenya.

Finally, I encourage us all to make a difference however small this to support this global initiative.

Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek - Barack Obama
I have been very fortunate to complete my paediatric training at the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) in Johannesburg, South Africa, and then to train paediatric pulmonology at Red Cross War Memorial Children’s Hospital in Cape Town. Once I completed my training I moved back to Johannesburg and established a paediatric pulmonology unit at Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital, and was elected Divisional Head of Paediatric Pulmonology at WITS.

I serve on the exco of the South African Thoracic Society and the National Asthma Education Programme. I completed my PhD looking at the long-term clinical and pulmonary function effects of RSV lower respiratory tract infection in infancy and continue to perform research in this field through the Vaccines and Infectious Diseases Analytics Research Unit, which has culminated in the opening of the first infant and child pulmonary function laboratory in Bangladesh.

My other research interests include paediatric bronchiectasis, HIV-associated lung disease and using digital innovation for the improvement of health diagnostics in LMICs. In my spare time, I spend time with my wonderful wife, three children, two cats and one dog. I love being on my mountain bike and there is no better feeling for me than to cycle over mountains, where and whenever I may find them.

I hope to assist in moving PATS forward through this new cycle of the executive, by continuing the amazing financial governance that has been apparent at PATS. The need for a continental body overseeing pulmonology in Africa has been long overdue, and the importance of stability and growth in this organization is imperative to increase the footprint of pulmonology on the continent and thereby to highlight and improve health for all. I look forward to contributing to this organization for the next two years and hopefully for much longer after that.

I am a dedicated paediatrician, pulmonologist, and global health researcher, holding a senior lecturer position at the University of Nairobi’s Department of Paediatrics and Child Health. My primary focus is on enhancing respiratory health, not only in Kenya but also on a regional and global scale, as demonstrated by my involvement in the Pan African Thoracic Society (PATS) to represent the East African region.

Following my pulmonology training, I initiated a paediatric pulmonology service at Kenya’s prominent Kenyatta National Hospital. I continue to build research and training collaborations with colleagues from existing networks, namely the African Paediatric Fellowship Program, the European Respiratory Society, the Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine, and the University of Washington.

I have established new networks in the Clean the Air Better Indoors for Newborns (CABIN) project comprising collaborators from Ghana, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Malawi, South Africa and the United Kingdom; the Berlin-Nairobi Global Heart Program fostering global health bilateral exchange for undergraduate medical students and faculty in Kenya and Germany; and local collaborations with colleagues at The Nairobi Hospital, Gertrude’s Children Hospital and KEMRI-Wellcome Trust focusing on respiratory health related research.

I have undertaken extensive training through PATS MECOR and have supervised numerous Master’s and PhD students, emphasizing my commitment to advancing research in paediatric respiratory health and advocating for preventative measures like vaccines and clean air.

As the East African representative in PATS, my goal is to address region-specific challenges and promote collaborative solutions. I envision PATS evolving into a pan-African society that offers continuous educational programs to strengthen the respiratory health workforce, establishes sustainable regional centres of respiratory health excellence in Africa, and fosters partnerships with national, regional, and international organizations focused on respiratory health education, research, and advocacy.