Improving the standard and safety of paediatric anaesthesia in South Africa

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this year’s PACSA edition of the journal.

What is PACSA? Many readers of the journal will be familiar with the acronym for the Paediatric Anaesthesia Congress of South Africa, the annual meeting of anyone with an interest in paediatric anaesthesia. That familiarity led us to retain the acronym “PACSA” when the Paediatric Anaesthesia Community of South Africa was officially established as a special interest group under the auspices of the South African Society of Anaesthesiologists at the end of last year.

You might be asking: “Why another special interest group?”, “What makes paediatric anaesthesia warrant its own group?” and “Is this an exclusive club that will force me out of paediatric practice?”

Recently, I was privileged to be able to spend a weekend in the Klaserie Nature Reserve with a team of passionate rhino conservationists, as part of a tagging and microchipping anti-poaching initiative on World Rhino Day. Quite apart from being fascinated by the drug combination required to sedate 2.5 tonnes of rhino, it struck me that the worldwide campaign against rhino poaching has parallels with our situation. The primary aim of conservationists is to improve the safety of this species. Achieving this involves several components. It starts with research and data collection, including DNA analysis, microchipping and individual animal identification. It involves ongoing education programmes and information sharing. It requires strong leadership and vision, resources and a coordinated effort, with teams working closely together (extreme coordination of numerous hands is needed to ensure the safe positioning of a rhino when she starts to wobble after receiving an industrial-strength dose of morphine!). Importantly, it is inclusive. Anyone can contribute, in several ways, to saving the species.

How much more effort should we be investing in ensuring the safety of human life? When last was there a World Paediatric Perioperative Safety Day? Or thousands of people in the streets, campaigning for better paediatric anaesthesia? That is PACSA’s primary aim: to improve the perioperative safety of children in South Africa. As with the rhino project, this involves several components. We need to obtain data on our current practice and on morbidity and mortality, and will only be able to achieve this through a coordinated national effort. We must become involved in the education and support of colleagues, specialist and non-specialist, urban and rural, throughout the country. Through a collaborative effort, we hope to generate guidelines for the safe and improved care of children in our hospitals. This is by no means the realm of an “exclusive few”. Improving the standard and safety of paediatric anaesthesia in South Africa affects us all.

We hope that you will join us in this exciting endeavour.

Dr Clover-Ann Lee
Chair, Paediatric Anaesthesia Community of South Africa