



The Breast Course for Nurses (BCN) is a registered NPO (NPO 147-129) and PBO (PBO 930050375) aimed at educating and upskilling healthcare workers in the breast care field. Our core team members are:



Prof Jenny Edge – Founder and Director



Dr Paul Whitehead – Treasurer and Director

Paul has been involved with the Breast Course for Nurses since it became an NPO. Paul is an anaesthetist and worked with my patients when I was in private practice. Paul is a director of the BCN and also manages the finances of our NPO.



Sr Lieske Wegelin – Registered Nurse and Administration

Sr Lieske has been a member of the BCN team since it's registration as an NPO in 2014. Sr Lieske has many years of experience within the breast field and has worked in both the private and public sector with breast patients. Sr Lieske is the go-to for all administration related to the BCN. She is also responsible for social media, content creation for the courses, as well as lecturing.

Whilst the above 3 people are the main active members of the BCN, our team is fluid and has had many members and visitors over the years. To name a few:

- Prof David Woods (retired neonatologist, co-author of the Breast Care book and BCN director)
- Dr Ronelle de Villiers
- Dr Britta Dedekind
- Dr Lindi Martin

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- Sr Elna Sutherland
- Sr Sheila Correia
- Sr Karen Hill
- Ms Michelle Norris

The BCN has always made use of external professionals in their fields to assist with projects as they arise. The last 2 courses held in Johannesburg were primarily run by Sr Ditebogo Mokwena, a registered nurse that completed our higher-level training course through the University of Stellenbosch in 2021. Sr Mokwena went on to assist us with the screening project in Khayelitsha in 2022 and has since assisted, when necessary, with training courses. Sr Mokwena is also presently working on the transfer of the higher-level Breast Care Course from Stellenbosch University.

Brigitta Kepkey, a Masters student from Stellenbosch University, has worked with the BCN for a number of years. Brigitta has assisted with administration, funding proposals, and most recently, she has played a pivotal role in the opening of the new breast clinic at the Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital (CMJAH). Brigitta oversaw liaising with the various stakeholders in the project and assisted with completion of administration to get the clinic up and running. Brigitta continues to assist with the BCN as and when required.



Sr Ditebogo Mokwena, Prof Jenny Edge, Sr Lieske Wegelin, Ms Brigitta Kepkey at the opening of the Breast Clinic at Charlotte Maxeke Hospital

As working within the BCN NPO is not the primary job of any of the above-mentioned individuals, we, as an organisation, need to take on individuals as necessary to assist with projects. This allows us to remain flexible while still reaching our goals of education within the breast field in South Africa as well as the greater Southern Africa.

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2024 started with a bang as we held a 3-day BCN course at the Far East Rand Hospital in Gauteng. This was attended by nurses from over 10 primary clinics and has resulted in the first secondary-level hospital breast clinic being opened in the Gauteng region. The photos below show the group that completed the BCN course at Far East Rand Hospital along with the opening of the breast clinic at Far East Rand Hospital.



One of the most important sessions held in the course at Far East Rand Hospital was a session dedicated to listening to the nurses that work within the primary clinics in the local area. One point that was brought up multiple times and remains high priority is the need for data and internet access to allow for electronic referral of patients into the general system.

In April, we held a course in Cape Town. This course was hosted by the Netcare Christiaan Barnard Memorial Hospital. We had 32 healthcare professionals in attendance. These healthcare professionals were from both state and private facilities which included various Netcare hospitals, New Somerset Hospital, Groote Schuur Hospital and private clinics. We even had a registered nurse from Worcester who travelled through each day especially for this course. Someone such as this individual is always a reminder as to how relevant and needed our courses are.

We had a very busy 3 days of learning and sharing. Topics covered at this course included:

- the normal breast
- benign changes of the breast
- clinical breast examination
- breast cancer
- genetics
- data collection
- special investigations of the breast
- patient journeys
- referral pathways
- advocacy
- palliative care
- biopsy technique practical session
- patient stories from local breast cancer survivors
- wound care

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- patient navigation
- lymphoedema



Our courses are only possible through collaboration. While we had 32 healthcare professionals attending the course as students, we had just over 20 individuals involved in making the course possible, all giving of their time to be a part of the project. This is excluding people such as yourself who play a big role in the funding side of our projects.

We involve local professionals, organisations and companies to join us in sharing their knowledge, skills and products thus making sure that the information that the participants receive is up to date and relevant. The Cape Town course had an all-local faculty from various health institutions across Cape Town - Netcare CBMH, Lancet Laboratories, Morton and Partners Radiologists and Merit Medical Solutions, to name a few.

We had a research associate from Johannesburg join us for this course. She had heard about the course and felt that it would be relevant to her line of work and research. She sent us these words after the course:

“I would encourage any researcher involved in breast cancer research not to miss this course. The theory and practical exercises vividly demonstrated real-life scenarios, and listening to the survivors share their experiences was truly inspiring”

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In July, we were invited to the nurse's session of the Bulawayo Breast Cancer Symposium which was part of the Matabeleland South Partnership Project. This project included workshops, lectures and tutorials.



Sr Lieske gave a talk to the Society of Private Nurse Practitioners (SPNP) about the role of breast nursing in Southern Africa and how the Breast Course for Nurses is involved with this. Trained breast nurses are few and far between in South Africa. The role of breast nurses aside from nursing patients within a hospital setting include patient navigation through the medical system and their

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cancer journey, the go-to person for all questions related to the management of the patient's breast cancer, the messenger between the doctor and the patient, and providing support and care through the journey to name a few.

Unfortunately, in South Africa, this is not a service that we can provide to all of our breast patients as we do not have enough trained breast nurses, and it is not yet recognised as a speciality field for nurses under the South African Nurses Council (SANC). We, as the BCN, continue to advocate for, and hope to achieve the recognition as a speciality and the need for trained breast nurses.



In November, a group of us (Brigitta Kepkey, Dr Linda Kumirayi, Dr Roussouw and myself), travelled to Zimbabwe. A course was run at the Chikombedzi Mission Hospital located in rural Zimbabwe. As this hospital is in a very rural part of Zimbabwe and sees mainly young women, the course was adapted to suit the needs of the local health care workers.



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Discussions on limitations in the system, patient follow-up, traditional healers and their involvement, financial implications, wound care and availability of resources were covered. For a part of the course, we took a different direction and divided into groups to discuss the 6 pillars identified by the Lancet commission report on breast cancer which include:

1. risk factor modification
2. personalised health care
3. registry
4. collaboration
5. hidden costs
6. communication

This proved to be an informative exercise in understanding the local situation and what can be done.



The course held at Chikombedzi is only the beginning of a long-term project. Our aim is to do more research and qualitative studies using projects such as these. We have been asked to run a workshop at the hospital but as they do not see many breast cancer cases, the workshop would be more of a research programme in 2 parts. The first day would be a day of education covering the principles of the BCN including palliative care and a biopsy session.

The second day would be aimed at listening to those in attendance. Topics to be discussed would include: problems that the healthcare workers encounter on a daily basis, communication and the problems surrounding this, referral pathways and whether or not they are efficient or even working, the best way forward, and what we should we doing to assist them.

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Not even getting stuck in the mud on the way to the hospital could stop us!



2025 had an exciting start as a new prefab clinic was delivered to CMJAH in January. This was a collaborative project with Novartis and Barberry Holdings. The CMJAH struggles with limited space for patient consultations, teaching, and research, exacerbated by overcrowding in the outpatient department, especially on Fridays. To improve the situation, the goal of this project was to create a dedicated freestanding breast centre on the grounds of the CMJAH. The centre would be used to enhance patient care, outcomes, skills, development and research. The BCN will also be able to use the space for future courses.

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The clinic was constructed offsite and delivered to the hospital grounds mid-January. The opening of the clinic was held on the 4th February, to coincide with World Cancer Day.

The opening ceremony was attended by many various individuals – the BCN, Novartis, Barberrry, NPO's, hospital staff, patients, WITS university, the hospital CEO as well as the MEC for Health and Wellness - Ms Nomantu Nkomo Ralehoko who addressed the group. Once the speeches were done, the ribbon-cutting ceremony commenced at the new clinic. This was attended by the main sponsors of the clinic while the rest of the group enjoyed refreshments.

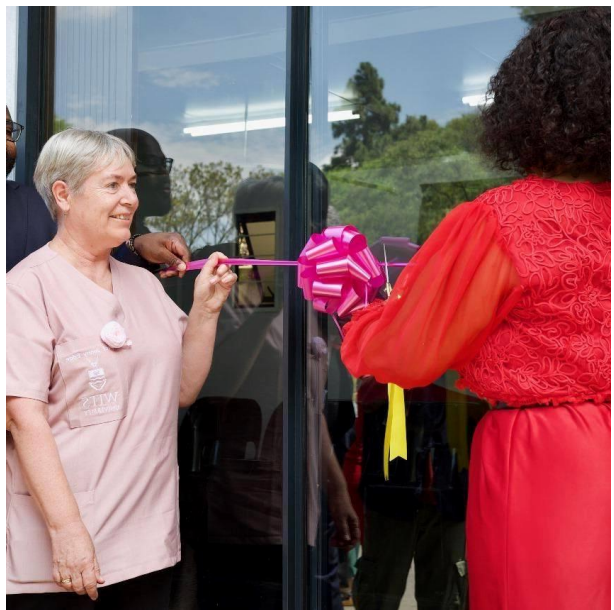
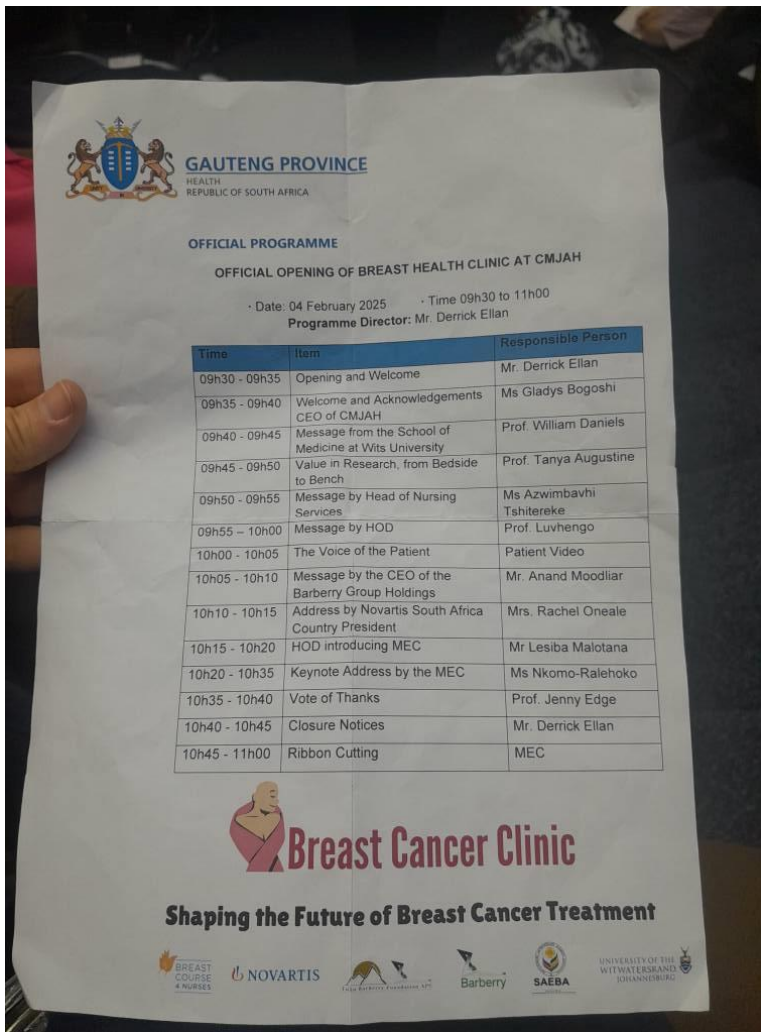
Shaping the Future of Breast Cancer Treatment



The first clinic was held in the new breast clinic only 3 days after its launch proving its need at the hospital. 45 patients were seen and assisted on that day alone!

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To end off the day's events, we arranged a round table elevator pitch session. This was attended by individuals including doctors, professors, surgeons, oncologists, Novartis, ICON Oncology, CMJAH staff, the hospital CEO, WITS, BCN and 2 visiting guests from America (Johns Hopkins and George Washington University). Each individual was allowed 3 minutes to raise their concerns, provide a "wish list", discuss a topic or really anything they wanted to bring to the table knowing who was attending the meeting.

We cannot move forward and create change without knowing what the ground level concerns are and without knowing when and where problems arise. One of our aims within the BCN is to address ground level problems in order to create better pathways for all of our breast patients. Many interesting points were brought up and discussed during this session.



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The BCN continues to be a sustainable organization which is ready to adapt to the needs of the healthcare professionals and patients that it serves. We continue to respond to changing needs within the healthcare system as well the private/public needs of patients and those that care for them.

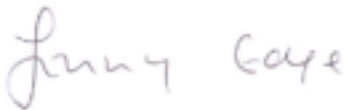
Donations assist us in keeping our organisation, the BCN, on the go and moving forward. Courses make a considerable difference to the knowledge of many primary healthcare workers and thus making a difference in the lives of the patients who come into contact with these healthcare workers.

All the projects that we work on, whether courses educating healthcare workers or other projects in terms of research, improving referral pathways and uplifting breast services within our healthcare system are only possible with assistance from individuals and organisations. Our organisation continues only because of donations and sponsorship received as well as individuals and companies that give of their time and resources. We do not receive any funding through the National Department of Health.

We have been invited to take part in this year's Matebeleland (Bulawayo) project in conjunction with the Association of Breast Surgery (UK), and will be going to Lesotho later in the year to assist with an ASCO run project. Being involved with international organisations means that the scope of what we can do has expanded enormously.

On behalf of all of the healthcare workers and in turn, the patients, who benefit from the work of the Breast Course for Nurses, we thank you.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Jenny Edge on behalf of the Breast Course for Nurses team

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