

Mental Health Founder Wins Award for Leadership



At a prestigious awards ceremony in Pretoria last Friday night, Zane Wilson Founder of SADAG (The South African Depression and Anxiety Group) was recognised as one of the Top 10 Influential Leaders in Health Care in South Africa by the South African Institute of Health Care Managers (SAIHCM).

The South African Institute of Health Care Managers is an association for health care managers working in both the public and the private health sectors. The Institute promotes the important role that health care managers and Advocates play in the health care environment by providing input in policy and decision-making activities that affect health care delivery at all levels.

The Deputy Minister of Health, Dr Gwen Ramokgopa gave the key note address at this prominent event which included Professors, Academics, Directors and representatives of the health care industry as well as USAID and Pefar Fellowship Delegates.

Ms Wilson, one of the ten recipients of the award was recognised for her exceptional work and contribution in 5 categories, namely;

- Community and rural outreach to the most impoverished areas to establish Mental Health support groups.
- Training and education in Mental Health for Traditional Healers and Sangomas, in Five provinces.
- Patient advocacy for better access to Mental Health Care in both Government and the Private sector
- Home Based Care Workers programmes and workshops to develop Mental Health skills
- Fighting for the rights of patients diagnosed with Bipolar to be included within the Medical Schemes coverage

SADAG was founded in 1994 and is South Africa's most influential Mental Health NGO.

Seventeen years ago, no-one spoke about mental illness. It was a taboo and highly stigmatised subject, and patient education and support was virtually non-existent.

People suffered in silence and alone, living in shame and afraid of being 'discovered'.

Today SADAG operates 15 help lines, taking up to 400 calls a day nationwide in all languages. A volunteer team of 100 trained counselors with over 160 support groups further advance and sustain this work.

SADAG is also known for their innovative Speaking Books enabling communities with low levels of literacy to understand critical health care information. The first Speaking Book to be created was on Teen Suicide to help alleviate South Africa's high youth suicide rate which currently accounts for 9.5% of all youth's deaths. Additional books on "Understanding Your Mental Health" recorded in English and Zulu, and "Living with HIV and AIDS Doesn't Mean Living With Depression" have established the Speaking Book as a leading low literacy communication tool resulting in 45 titles in 18 languages for distribution in Africa, Asia, North and South America.

Zane Wilson has been the recipient of numerous awards including South African Woman of the Year 1998, World Bank Award for Development in Mental Health, PharmaVoice USA as one of the 100 most inspiring people in Health, AfricomNet Pefar Award for Excellence in Communications in HIV and AIDS, CPSI Public Sector Service and Innovation Award, TIGA - UNESCO Award for sustainable innovation.

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