

A surgeon shares knowledge with healthcare professionals the world over

Pretoria, Friday, 14 May 2009 – South African surgical expertise once again came under the international spotlight this morning when renowned laparoscopic surgeon Prof Heine van der Walt performed a live procedure which was broadcast to 85 hospitals around the world.

This is by no means a new experience for Prof Van der Walt, who has shared his expertise with colleagues around the world during major international symposiums before. This time, however, he performed a more advanced procedure – a thoracoscopic extended transthoracic esophagus myotomy plus a laparoscopic Heller myotomy and Toupet antireflux procedure. The procedure was beamed from Netcare Unitas Hospital in Centurion, South Africa to his peers around the world this morning. This was also the first time that the transmission was done in high-definition TV.

Prof Van der Walt, who is regarded as one of the world's leading laparoscopic surgeons, previously performed a procedure on a patient with a hiatal hernia live from Unitas Hospital. The procedure performed today formed part of the 20th Digestive Apparatus Surgery Conference currently being held in Rome, Italy. During the live broadcast he demonstrated the latest procedures and techniques to the world's finest laparoscopic surgeons.

Prof Van der Walt's demonstrative procedure has again showcased South Africa's advances in this field. During the live feed experts from around the world were able to discuss techniques, ideas and experiences and tap into the mind of the man whose prowess is respected around the world.

The emphasis of this year's 20th Digestive Apparatus Surgery Conference is on demonstrative procedures with live multicast transmissions via satellite or ISDN lines from centres around the world. This event, which is taking place in Rome on 14 and 15 May, has become one of the most important scientific events in Italy over the years.

The regional director: north east for the Netcare Group of hospitals, Dr Karin Prins, says that Prof Van der Walt is considered a world leader in the field of oesophageal laparoscopic surgery. Prof Van der Walt, who is in private practice at Netcare Unitas Hospital, is associated with the Department of Surgery at the University of Pretoria and was president of the South African Society of Endoscopic Surgeons.

Adelle Johnstone, general manager, Netcare Unitas Hospital added: "Prof Van der Walt has probably performed more procedures of this type than anyone else. He is an acclaimed international speaker, has published cutting-edge medical papers, and undertaken a number of educational surgical workshops. He has not only contributed to medical science at a global level, but has firmly positioned SA as a leader in the medical world."

She continued: "The previous live broadcast Prof Van der Walt participated in resulted in a HASA (Hospital Association of South Africa) nomination for newsmaker or introducing new technology to the industry."

According to Dr Prins, it is unusual to find a specialist in private practice in South Africa who is able to find the time and energy to continue to contribute to the development of their profession in the way Prof Van der Walt has. "Prof Van der Walt is certainly a great credit to both his profession and his country."

The live broadcast will highlight the work that is being done at the internationally acclaimed Netcare Unitas Hospital, one of the largest private hospitals on the African continent. "The hospital is committed to keeping pace with advancing technology while striving to render exceptional services that satisfy the needs of patients, doctors and the communities that it serves," Johnstone stressed.