

ALL IN A day's work

More and more procedures are being done in day hospitals, which means a saving in both time and money, writes Georgina Guedes

although the concept of day hospitals is not new, progress in medical technology means that more procedures can now be carried out safely and effectively at these facilities.

According to Marti Gelderblom, the executive officer of the Day Hospital Association (DHA), day hospitals offer surgical and diagnostic procedures that are performed on a same-day basis. "Almost 70% of all surgical procedures can be performed safely in a day hospital, with substantial savings for patients and medical schemes."

The DHA is an umbrella, non-profit organisation that represents a national footprint of 42 registered, independent private day hospitals.

Dr Cornelius von der Heyden is an anaesthetist who works at both the Bellville and Somerset West Day Hospitals in the Western Cape. Although he doesn't work exclusively in day hospitals, he believes there is growing reason for surgeons to use these facilities, and for patients to request that their procedures be done there.

"Medical technology and advances in anaesthetics have changed the way we can do things," he says. "Patients don't require an overnight stay, and after limited surgery with a keyhole approach, they wake up nausea-free and pain-free, and they recover much more quickly."

Medical advances mean that procedures such as orthopaedics, gynaecology, urology, ear, nose and throat surgery, maxillofacial surgery, gastroenterology, ophthalmology and dentistry (among others) can all be carried out in day hospitals.

Medical aids are starting to put pressure on doctors to elect to do surgery in these facilities for short-stay procedures, because the theatre charge per minute is more affordable. However, Von der Heyden says there are other very compelling reasons for patients to choose day hospitals.

"If you are admitted into an acute hospital with sick people and patients with possible multiple-site infections, the risk of infection is significantly higher. Day case admissions have a lower rate of infection. From a patient's perspective, this is a significant advantage."

He also says that being able to walk in and walk out of a day hospital is a lot less intimidating for patients, which provides a psychological boost to the healing process. Simply put, patients feel less sick.

And day hospitals are also equipped with state-of-the-art medical equipment. "Day hospitals are required by law to provide all the emergency and resuscitation equipment that any other theatre would have," adds Von der Heyden.

Gelderblom notes that patients also benefit from guaranteed discharge times, as theatre lists remain unchanged and theatre cases are not moved to later in the day because of medical emergencies.

She says that, in the same way, doctors benefit from improved productivity with faster patient turnaround times, and happier patients who receive treatment in a more relaxed environment. They are also able to work with the latest equipment, as day hospitals are continuously investing in and upgrading their facilities.

Despite all of these benefits, Gelderblom says South Africa's utilisation of day hospitals is lagging behind that of the rest of the world. In the years to come, pressure from medical aids and patients should see more and more procedures being performed in these facilities, with better physical, psychological and financial outcomes for patients. 🍎



PROCEDURES THAT CAN BE CARRIED OUT AT A DAY HOSPITAL

Almost 70% of all surgical procedures can be performed safely in a day hospital, with substantial savings for patients and medical schemes.

- Ear, nose and throat procedures
- Gynaecological procedures
- General surgery
- Minor breast procedures
- Ophthalmology procedures
- Dental surgery
- Scopes: gastroscopy, colonoscopy, sigmoidoscopy, etc
- Vascular: varicose vein stripping
- Urological procedures
- Orthopaedic procedures
- Cosmetic surgery
- Maxillofacial surgery
- Dermatology
- Pain blocks and pain management