

ADHD screening clinic launched

The first free mobile clinic for ADHD screening and early intervention of underprivileged children in the country was recently launched in Cape Town.

With at least one in 20 children in South Africa suffering from ADHD, early detection and treatment is vital, says Bellville-based psychiatrist, Dr Renata Schoeman.

Schoeman and Nic de Beer, businessman and top SA athlete who is moving to Durbanville this month, launched the Goldilocks and The Bear Foundation.

The foundation aims to initially screen 500 children per month of the estimated 200 000 in the Western Cape who currently have no access to such services. The plan is to reach children nationally.

In an effort to raise funds to purchase the two small vehicles needed and to employ four sisters to start the school visits and screening, De Beer and Schoeman recently completed the gruelling 91km Cell C AfricanX trail run in fancy dress costume. The foundation is now calling on businesses and community-based organisations to further assist them in their fundraising efforts.

According to Schoeman, many children who suffer from ADHD do not have access to medical care, especially those in rural areas, and their symptoms go undetected, which is detrimental to the full development of the child.

"Although mental health clinics exist in the public sector, children with ADHD often never reach this point of diagnosis and treatment due to a lack of awareness and knowledge in their communities. They are never screened for ADHD and may be labelled as naughty or 'stupid' or just silently fall out of the educational system and only come to our attention when absorbed in the criminal justice system," she says.

"ADHD, if not treated, can cause significant personal, interpersonal and social burdens, impacting negatively on overall quality of life.

"Children could suffer from learning disabilities, anxiety, depression, conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, tics or Tourette's syndrome and substance abuse," says Schoeman.

Furthermore, educational attainment is negatively affected by ADHD, and research has shown that those diagnosed with ADHD completed on average two years less of formal schooling and attained a lesser employment status than those without, she says.

Schoeman says the symptoms are a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with daily functioning, accompanied by associated behavioural, cognitive, emotional and social problems, which can lead to school or work-related and interpersonal difficulties.

"Inattention manifests behaviourally in ADHD as difficulty sustaining focus, wandering off tasks, lacking persistence, paralyzing procrastination, poor time management, inefficiency and being disorganised.

"Hyperactivity refers to excessive motor activity when it is not appropriate, or excessive fidgeting, tapping or talkativeness, whilst impulsivity refers to hasty actions that occur in the moment, without forethought, and have high potential for harm to the individual. This may reflect reward dependence and a need for immediate gratification.

"Impulsive behaviours may manifest as



Dr Renata Schoeman (left) and Nic de Beer, both keen athletes, recently completed the gruelling 91km Cell C AfricanX trail run in fancy dress costume in aid of the Goldilocks and The Bear Foundation. PHOTO: TOBIAS GINSBERG

social intrusiveness, a low frustration tolerance, mood lability and losing one's temper, making important decisions without consideration of long-term consequences, and addictive behaviours."

Nurses and psychologist interns will be trained to screen the rating scales for children to identify possible symptoms of ADHD, followed by a more in-depth screening to confirm probable ADHD.

Schoeman says the whole purpose of these screenings, which require consent from the

parents, will ensure early referral and diagnostic confirmation at public mental health clinics to ensure timely intervention and treatment. They will also embark on an extensive drive to raise awareness and educate teachers and parents on ADHD.

Organisations or individuals who would like to get involved in the project or assist with funding can visit www.gb4adhd.co.za or send an email to info@gb4adhd.co.za.

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