During the last AGM we reported that SA Heart is moving towards a formal business structure, and the Association is now a registered Non for Profit Company, the South African Heart Association NPC. With that change comes a new structure, that of a Board of Directors besides the normal SA Heart Executive. Five directors duly nominated and voted for have seen the SA Heart NPC through its near full first year of its existence. From the beginning of the financial year we are then also trading under this name, and in conjunction with that our Trademark application was finally approved and awarded after it took a few years for the process to come to fruition. Both “South African Heart Association” as well as “SA Heart” and the logo are now registered trademarks.

Under the new business structure we continued with three National Advisory Council meetings introduced last year, now also including the Directors of the Board besides the SA Heart Executive and heads of Special Interest Groups and Branches. I want to sincerely thank firstly my colleagues on the SA Heart Executive and Board for all the support and co-operation received, but also all members of the National Council who took out time from their busy schedules to attend these meetings, their active participation and fruitful discussions besides all the work done within their respective groups which they will report on themselves. Many an hour is spent to further the goals of SA Heart and to make the lives of our members easier.

Sadly, Prof Stephen Brown who was voted vice president last year, withdrew from this position in June this year due to personal and departmental circumstances. This position was then advertised for nomination again out of cycle in this year’s nomination process.

The SA Heart position paper on the state of cardiology and cardiac surgery training started last year has now been published in the Cardiovascular Journal of Africa. I have written to the Minister of Health, forwarding this article and expressing our grave concern from SA cardiac community as well as the global perspective in my capacity as president-elect World Heart federation. On 15th August, I, Dr Zühlke and Prof John Anthony (Head of Maternity in Groote Schuur) met with the Minister of Health, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi and Prof Melvyn Freeman (chief director for NCDs at the national department of health) at the ministry for a lengthy meeting and discussed in detail the training shortage for nurses, cardiologists, paediatric cardiologists and cardiothoracic surgeons. The minister is fully aware of this situation and is busy addressing this in various ways. He is open to further discussion and interaction and the SA Heart Executive will report back on further development at the next AGM.

Rules are changing for industry which influence the way industry companies will or may be involved in congresses in future. SAMED invited role players from the industry and medical Associations to present these changes, what they mean and when they will come into effect. SA Heart is busy formulating guidelines from within SA Heart which we want to present to industry in an effort to further attract sponsorships and how delegate support could be routed through the Association.

SA Heart is getting increasingly involved in international collaboration:
At the beginning of 2016 a delegation from the European Heart Rhythm Association (EHRA), a sub-speciality group of the European Society of Cardiology approached the South African Heart Association, the Cardiac Arrhythmia Society of South Africa (CASSA) and the Pan African Society of Cardiology (PASCAR) for closer collaboration. Representatives of EHRA met with Drs Andrew Thornton and Ashley Chin from CASSA to learn more about each other’s activities and structures and challenges and to discuss possibilities for collaboration. A symposium on Sudden Cardiac Death hosted by SA Heart concluded this visit.

SA Heart has again been invited by the European Society of Cardiology to participate in a joined symposium during the ESC congress in Rome this year. I submitted a session addressing the subject of Addressing Rheumatic Heart Disease in Adults. Bongani Mayosi chaired this session together Alain Berrebi from France, and Dr Liesl Zühlke presented on The burden of Disease, while Prof Mpiko Ntsekhe contributed with a talk on Valve Thrombosis and Anticoagulation. Prof Catherin Szymanski from France spoke on Diagnostic work up and prognostic factors and Prof Manuel Antunes from Portugal added his talk on Valve replacement vs repair. As part of this mutual arrangement the ESC is bringing highlights from their congress and updates on guidelines to our congress in South Africa. Over the past years, under my leadership, the SA Heart and ESC have strengthened their interaction under a number of activities, which also includes leadership activities in the EuroObservational Research program. Data from the first 400 patients entered into the world wide registry on PPCM under EuroObs Registry Research program are presented as a Late Breaking Trail session during the ESC congress by K. Sliwa (Tuesday, 30th August 14.00). In the same session Dr. Zühlke, will present data from the REMEDY registry. This is the first time that we have two prestigious Late Breaking trial sessions from SA Heart members presented at the ESC.

While a number of SA Heart members have been both attending and speaking at the World Congress of Cardiology for some years, it is the first time SA Heart was also presented by way of an exhibition booth at the WHF congress in Mexico this year. During this congress and coinciding AGM of the WHF I was voted president-elect of the World Heart Federation. I foresee a strong collaboration with SA Heart and the WHF. I am in discussions with the WHF to hold the Global Summit WHF as a 1 day workshop prior to the SA Heart congress, in November 2017. This will also be in interaction with the Pan African Society of Cardiology (PASCAR), in which I serve as the treasurer.

SA Heart has awarded three travel grants since the last AGM. Natasha Driescher presented her poster on Long-term Sugar-sweetened Beverage Intake elicits Early Metabolic Perturbations in Rat Hearts: a Bitter-sweet Taste? during the Experimental Biology Congress in California. Ferriel Azibani presented her abstract on Galectin 3 plasma levels at baseline correlates with poor clinical outcome in patients with peripartum cardiomyopathy at the ESC Heart Failure Conference in Florence and Rauchika Meel was awarded the third scholarship for to present her poster and two oral abstracts in the category valvular heart disease at the SA Heart congress this year. Feedback from these recipients reported in the SA Heart Newsletter emphasize the value of research done in South Africa, but also the importance of networking opportunities during such congresses.
Dr Nqoba Tsabedze was awarded the SA Heart Research Grant in 2015 and has since submitted a comprehensive update report on his research on “Genetics of Idiopathic Dilated Cardiomyopathy (IDCM) in Johannesburg”. The primary objective of this project is to identify and define the genetic variants responsible for IDCM in our local population.

I want to thank all members of SA Heart for the trust they have put in me during my tenure as SA Heart president. I wish Dr. Liesl Zühlke and the new incoming SA Heart Executive a productive tenure 2016-2018 and will provide support as past-president.

Karen Sliwa,
SA Heart President