

WORLD ASTHMA DAY IN SA

This year's World Asthma Day (4 May) in South Africa was a great success. The purpose of World Asthma Day (WAD) was to raise awareness of the importance of asthma as a global problem and to highlight the burden of disease in South Africa. The theme of WAD as created by the Global Initiative of Asthma (GINA) was the global burden of disease; to coincide with WAD, GINA released a report on this. In South Africa emphasis was placed on the burden of disease in terms of prevalence of asthma and incidence of fatal and near-fatal asthma.

The National Asthma Education Programme (NAEP) and the Allergy Society of South Africa (ALLSA) contracted a public relations company, Meropa Communications, to raise awareness about asthma. Dr Mike Levin representing NAEP and Prof. Heather Zar from ALLSA, with the assistance of Meropa, coordinated a national campaign to highlight the burden of disease and the efficacy of preventative and reliever therapy.

Meropa identified the need for high profile persons to champion asthma awareness. Fortunately, two asthmatics, Shaun Bartlett (who plays for Charlton Athletic and is lead goal scorer for Bafana Bafana) and Moeneeb Josephs (who is Ajax Cape Town's goalkeeper), agreed to endorse the World Asthma Day campaign. They helped generate ink around World Asthma Day. There was a lot of media coverage on asthma; the bulk of this was electronic (i.e. TV and radio).

The centrepiece of the electronic coverage was a *3 Talk* programme which featured panellists Dr Robin Green, Prof. Prakash Jeena and Dr Mike Plitt. The specialists made lucid points about asthma and its treatment, and people phoned in from around the country with their asthma queries. The *3 Talk* show aired on SABC3 on Monday, 3 May and was repeated the next day.

SABC and eTV camera crews went to the Red Cross Children's Hospital, Cape Town, on World Asthma Day. Prof. Cas Motala and Dr Mike Levin were captured on film, together with a couple of asthmatic children who excelled at sports; footage was broadcast on SABC1 News that evening.

The new Western Cape MEC for Health and a representative from the Department of Health attended talks given by Prof. Motala, Dr Levin and Prof. Zar at the Red Cross Children's Hospital on 4 May.

A number of doctors and organisations also arranged initiatives in other provinces. These included a swimming gala at King's Park swimming stadium, a presentation to the Department of Health and a lecture to GPs in Petersburg, as well as various patient education workshops and lectures to healthcare practitioners around the country.

See p.86 for Poetry competition



Going where the air is thin: South African mountaineers Chris Drummond (middle) and Mike Nixon at the Cape Town International Airport departure hall before flying off to Mount Everest. Prof Heather Zar, executive member of the Allergy Society of South Africa and paediatric pulmonologist at Red Cross Children's Hospital, holds up an asthma pump (with spacer) for Chris. Both Chris and Mike are wearing blue ribbons to show their support for World Asthma Day. These two mountaineers, together with a third Capetonian, André Bredenkamp, summited Mount Everest from the treacherous North Face recently.