



HATS OFF TO SILENT HEROES

Friday, 20th August, is International Day of Medical Transporters – a day to recognise and salute the people who get us where we need to be in times of ill health.

The history of medical transportation began with the invention of the wheel, but only on a large scale in World War I, where field ambulances transported the injured to health facilities for treatment. Today, ambulances are used to transport people to centres for treatment, to respond to emergencies, and to move medicines and medical equipment to where it is needed.

This year, more than ever, medical transporters should be commended for their tireless work through the global pandemic of COVID-19. Transporting people, often from rural areas, to hospitals and temporary care shelters, as well as delivering the vaccines to all areas of the country has been an essential cog in the wheel of saving lives.

More than just a job

The roles of medical transporters vary, but most in South Africa are both drivers and paramedics, providing pre-hospital emergency care. Like many roles in the medical profession, it is considered a calling, rather than merely a job. Qualifications involve a driving license, specialist permits and registrations with governing bodies.

Paramedics needed medical training, obtained through short courses or formal training, such as a two-year Diploma, or a four-year Bachelor's degree.

According to Emergency Live, paramedics need to be confident, outgoing, physically fit and healthy, and have a caring attitude. Anecdotal accounts of what it's like to be a first responder, however, show that these heroes need more: quick thinking, the ability to work long hours, mental fortitude, courage, and tenacity.

A study on the psychological effects of emergency medical work, published on BMC Psychiatry, showed high rates of mental distress, mental illness and physical effects of psychological injury. Work-related stress and exposure to traumatic events is a daily occurrence, which can lead to depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Ambulance personnel, while providing or coordinating the essential out-of-hospital or pre-hospital emergency medical care in the community, are 'the forgotten profession' within the healthcare system. Reach out on August 20th, and show you care!