



CANCER CARE NETWORK & DOCTORS RUNNING FOR CANCER CAUSE FUNDRAISING



It takes dedication to run 'The Ultimate Human Race'. Some of our local doctors took up the challenge to raise funds for cancer. Cancer is a disease that can affect anyone, young or old. Dr's Gerald Madziyire, Bothwell Guzha, Taonga Mukonoweshuro, and Menard Machokoto are doctors who provide services at Parirenyatwa Hospital and witness first-hand, the challenges that are being faced by our healthcare facility.

In conversation, Dr. Guzha mentioned to Dr. Tsikai who is the Chairperson and one of the trustees of The Cancer Care Network, Zimbabwe, that he and a few other doctors who would be running the 90 km Comrades Marathon' on the 28th of August from Pietermaritzburg to Durban in South Africa. To which Dr. Nomsa suggested running for the cancer cause. This resonated with the doctors who witness patients failing to get the necessary treatment and some prematurely losing their lives due to cancer. This was the beginning of the partnership between "The Doctors Running for The Cancer Cause" and Cancer Care Network, Zimbabwe.

The Comrade's Marathon is like running from Harare to Kadoma, for me to imagine running for 9 hours is mind-boggling but the take home is that, once you put your mind to something, do all you can to finish well! As the runners say, you need to keep moving, putting one foot in front of the other. Challenges will come but keep going! Prepare for the journey ahead! Be determined and make the most of every situation!



We did not have a great deal of time to prepare our fundraising drive, as the Comrades Marathon was three weeks away. But what we lacked in time, we had a double portion in commitment and desire to bring hope and help. Even if it was bringing hope and respite into 'Just One Woman's Life'.

Sunday, the 21st of August was set for the pre-comrades run/walk/cycle at Mukuvisi Woodlands. One hundred and sixty-five family members, friends, and colleagues came to rally behind the doctors and kick-start the fundraising drive. We were honoured to have the support of Brands Africa, Focal Point, Getaway Specialised Tours, MIC, Baines InterCare, Cabs, and the wonderful Team Caro who were prepared to do anything and everything to make sure that the day went smoothly.

One week later, the Comrades Marathon

took place. The air in Durban was thick with excitement and anticipation. Thousands of runners passed through the doors of the Durban Conference Centre to get their registration done. On Sunday, 28th August, 10 000 runners from all corners of the earth set off, excited that this momentous day had finally come.

I have had the privilege to spend time with the doctors and I am honoured to be able to share our conversations.

'Dr. Menard, tell me how long have you been running and what got you started?'

"Thanks for asking, I started running ten years ago to manage my general physical health, particularly my immune system."

The Comrades Marathon is referred to as "The Ultimate Human Race" what was the feeling at the starting point and during the run?

"The night before the race was far from ideal. Knowing that I needed to catch a bus from Durban to Pietermaritzburg at 2 am, I had my pasta dinner at 6 pm, and was tucked in bed by 7 pm, but tossed and turned until 11 pm. Just as I was about to catch some sleep my alarm went off, it was 1 am and I was ready to rumble. Rather surprisingly, despite it being my maiden run I was exceptionally calm about the challenge before me. I had all the confidence in the effort of preparation and had hardly any nerves on the start line."

The race was called 'Down run' had you prepared for this?

"I was confident in my preparation, but 20km into the race I was wondering what down run this was as I had done a substantial climb, however, I continued with some restraint to the pace."



When the terrain got tough did you feel like giving up?

"At 45km, the first trace of doubt emerged, physically exhausted, I suddenly had the urge to move my bowels. So, I had to make a quick plan, 2-3 minutes lost to an explosive motion. I reassured myself the task was still at hand and before long I was back in my stride."

When did the run become difficult?
 "Up to 80km I was feeling good, and then all of a sudden, the wheels came off and the remaining 10km became a test of everything that was within me. However, I willed my body forward to the finish line. The exhilaration of finally being a comrade runner was beyond description."
 "My personal inspiration is to live passionately! Enjoying unspoiled nature and home gardening."

"I hope to be able to do 10 Comrades marathons in the next ten years and I encourage the majority of the Zimbabwean population to live life with an attitude of determination, to never give up, and to own their destiny."

Dr. Menard, what advice would you give the next person?

"Once you start something, see it through. When the going gets tough it's ok to slow down, but do not quit until the task is done."

'Dr. Bothwell Guzha thank you for sharing your journey.

"Thank you for asking me, I started running in 2018 to complement my sedentary lifestyle and to manage my personal mental wellness as advised by my therapist."

Let's talk about the 'Ultimate Human Race', which happened to be your first Comrades Run. What were you feeling as you stood at the starting point and during the run?

"Well, marathon running is as much of a mental journey as it is a physical one. At first, I felt very nervous and later on excited as I saw a multitude of other runners."

During the challenging periods, what motivated you?

"I was motivated by the confidence that I had trained well, and by other supportive runners along the way. Mostly, the cancer cause gave me the energy to go on as I now had an obligation to fulfill the cause."

As the terrain got tough, I experienced mixed feelings and thoughts like, 'Why did I even start'? 'Am I going to make it'? These thoughts started coming and I just accepted that this is tough and I have to give it my best shot."

Where do you see yourself in the next 10 years?

"I see myself running the Two Oceans marathon and the Comrades ultramarathons every year for the next 10 years. My desire is to participate in as many marathons as I can every year."

What are you passionate about?

"Besides running, I am passionate about travelling and seeing new places. I see running as a blessing that has the added bonus of allowing me to travel around the world doing what I love best. I have a keen interest in reading self-help books, novels and enjoy listening to audiobooks. The prevention and treatment of female reproductive system cancers, drive and motivate me."



"If I could give someone one bit of advice it would be, to avoid sedentary lifestyles, find a sport you love, and live an active life. Eat healthy food and enjoy life as tomorrow is not guaranteed, life is short!"

Dr. Taonga, thank you for sharing your story with me. Tell me, how did you start running?

"I started running to keep fit as I realised that I was approaching the hallmark of turning, 40. I started enjoying it and joined a running club, where I started appreciating the company and encouragement of other runners. Which led me to sign up for my first Two Oceans ultra-marathon and that forced me out of my comfort zone. I found that the more I trained and ran, the more I wanted to do more. Running became the time I could reflect and pause from the normal challenges of life."

Dr. Taonga where do you see yourself ten years from now?

"I am targeting 10 Comrades marathons to get a permanent green number allocated to me as well as a blue number which comes after running ten Two Oceans marathons."

"I am passionate about family, friends, and work. We all need good relationships that help us to live fulfilled lives. My belief is that each of us must do the best we can so that we have a better quality of life."

Dr. Mugove you can be referred to in the groups as the veteran, how did you start running?

"I started running in 1995 when I was a medical student at the University of Zimbabwe. This was prompted by a comment made by one of my consultants on how unfit I was when I went for a step ECG during an insurance evaluation. I started with inconsistent short runs which built up slowly to longer distances as a junior doctor. In 2004 I started serious running after I joined the Harare Athletic Club. To date, I have done many ultra-marathons including 11 'Comrades' and '6 Two Oceans' marathons. Running offers me time to refresh, meditate and pray. It has widened my social network as over the past two decades, I have interacted and made friends with people of various backgrounds. I am in my twilight running years now but will try and maintain my current fitness for the next 10 years. Other than running I enjoy outdoor life and admiring nature. I also enjoy motorbiking! With my children mostly grown up and away from home the family time is now just me and my wife. I support her hobbies while she supports my running. I advise people to have a physical hobby as it helps them stay physically and mentally fit."

Tell me about the Comrades 'Ultimate Human Race', what was the feeling leading up to the race day and how did you feel at the starting point and during the race?

"Comrades has always presented an exciting yearly challenge to me. My 11th Comrades run was more special than others, and was run on the 28th of August 2022 after a 2-year break because of COVID."

"As the race day drew closer, I experienced some anxiety as to whether I still had the

level of fitness required to conquer the 90km run from Pietermaritzburg to Durban."

What were your feelings about the days leading to the race and at the starting line? I know you had run 10 previous Comrades, but I believe no two can be the same.

"During the days leading up to the race, my mind ran over the race strategy over and over especially the night before the run."

At the starting line, I experienced mixed emotions, nervous chattering, and an urgent need to go to the mobile toilet, which is something a lot of runners confess to experiencing. As the race started there was acceptance that I am finally in, and no matter what happens, I have to hold on to the end. In order to lessen the pressure, I had to concentrate on the nearest target. Initially, it was getting to Polly Shortts, which is a steep descent 10kms away as you leave Pietermaritzburg, followed by Inchanga Hill, which is the first of the big five climbs around 35km, followed by the Killer Drummond climb at the halfway mark."

"By this time, my energy was gone and my muscles were aching, it was only willpower carrying me forward. I kept pushing, knowing the joy that would come at the finish line would make the pain worthwhile, I just needed to keep moving. My thoughts were on my loved ones who were praying for me as they tracked my run on the mobile app, and my pledge to raise funds for the cancer cause. This reminded me that this run was not about me, but about the many women who need cancer treatment and drugs. As the pain intensified, I knew that the end was drawing closer. Soon I was at Field Hill where I started the descent into Durban and a new motivation came over me as I realised that I was on the final 20km. As I entered Durban, a sense of accomplishment came over me. With just 10km to go, I said my prayers. No words can describe the rush of emotions that came over me as I entered Moses Madiba Stadium. My loved ones were there encouraging me. Having my parents present to witness me finish the race is something I will never forget. As I entered the tunnel I could hear the screams and claps of many unknowns who in spite of not knowing me were proud of me. I am so thankful to God for the grace to run this race and I am happy that through this run I could make a difference in the lives of many women with cancer. I thank God for His Grace and I promise myself that I will be back next year."

"Any race is not an easy feat, Comrades is on another level altogether. My advice to anyone thinking of running Comrades is, anyone, make up your mind, set training and mental targets and then START! No matter how distant the goal is, start. This is true in running and true in other areas of life."

Thank you so much for all your efforts. Its people like you who made it all possible and worthwhile. You must be asking who is Cancer Care Network and what do they do?

Cancer Care Network Zimbabwe (CCNZ) is a non-governmental, apolitical organisation established in 2021, to improve





cancer services in Zimbabwe. We believe there is a great need to close the cancer care gap and are passionate about sharing information on prevention, early detection, treatment options, and all related activities through publications, physical, and zoom events. Once a month we have a zoom meeting that is focused on the cancer of the month.

A cancer diagnosis is challenging and affects the individuals who have received this diagnosis, their support system (family and friends) as well as health care providers. As such, Cancer Care Network Zimbabwe has formed different support groups. Some of the support groups that are in place are for patients with different cancer diagnoses, their spouses, and adult children. These groups are a 'safe place' where people can interact with their peers by sharing their victories, challenges, hopes, and fears.

2022 has been an exciting and fruitful year. We witnessed the power that comes when we unite, and how many hands make light work as evidenced by the following events done from January 2022.

1. Cervical Cancer Online and Physical event at Meikles Hotel (28th of January 2022) which was made possible through the generous sponsorship of Generation Health.
2. Donations of hampers were made possible through the generosity of Brands Africa who donated 40 hampers to patients at the Radiotherapy Centre at Parirenyatwa Hospital.
3. Fundraising Walk/Run/Cycle at Mukuvisi Woodlands (9th of April 2022) where we focused on raising awareness of Cervical Cancer and collected sanitary pads and adult diapers which were then donated to Parirenyatwa Hospital.
4. Celebrating Life Survivors High Tea at Vanilla Moon (26th of June), which was a beautiful event sponsored by loved ones, doctors, and friends.

5. Doctors Running for Cancer – Pre-Comrades Walk/Run/Cycle at Mukuvisi Woodlands (21st of August) which was followed by the Doctors Running for Cancer 'Comrades Marathon in Durban on the 28th of August.
6. Handover ceremony of resources raised towards the treatment of female cancer at Parirenyatwa Hospital.
7. Celebration of Hope Breast Cancer Breakfast at Cresta Lodge (28th of October)

Our hopes for 2023

We have made great strides in 2022 and we believe that the sky is the limit. Successful events are great but more importantly, it is seeing that lives have changed and knowing the cancer care gap is closing. This is not possible if we work as an island but when we come together, building one brick at a time until we have a stronger healthcare system.

Events planned for 2023

In January we will hold a Cervical Cancer fundraising event, followed by a 5km walk/10km run to commemorate World Cancer Day.

A word from the Vice Chairperson – Dr. Audrey Chivaura

As the trustees of Cancer Care Network, we are committed to working tirelessly with all partners so that CCNZ does its part to help in closing the cancer care gap in Zimbabwe by being the trusted, reliable voice for cancer patients, survivors, caregivers and health care workers.

We are committed to disseminating world-class and relevant information on cancer to Zimbabweans as we walk side by side with all Zimbabweans. We believe that information is power and commit to educating and empowering through information.

