



# A place of Quiet faith

Set in a coastal countryside of breathtaking beauty, Zithulele Hospital in the Eastern Cape is a beacon of quality rural healthcare, say Gus Silber.

**T**he light in the Eastern Cape shines like a benediction, on lilting hills and valleys that unfurl all the way to the sea.

Here at Coffee Bay on the Wild Coast, where cattle stroll onto the beach in search of licks of salt, the waves have pounded a hole in a wall of rock, leaving a testament to the power of persistence.

It is a place of sanctuary, untamed and

untouched by the troubles of the world. But just a few kilometres along a winding dirt track, there lies a haven of another kind.

Zithulele, Xhosa for "The Quiet One", is a place of hope and healing, founded on the faith of missionaries more than 50 years ago. But faith alone is not enough to run a hospital.

In a small room dubbed the Resource Centre, down the corridor from the busy

waiting area, the lights dim as the clinical staff take their seats to watch a PowerPoint presentation on a case study of successful patient care.

It's part of a tradition of knowledge-sharing and teamwork instituted by the Clinical Manager of Zithulele, Dr Benjamin Gaunt, who in 2005 felt a calling to enter the field of rural healthcare.

Together with his wife, Dr Taryn Gaunt, he



“ What keeps us here is not our jobs and our salaries. It’s the knowledge that we are able to make a difference to people and their lives, by treating them with respect, dignity and care. ”

was drawn to this remote outpost, then a run-down district facility with little in the way of resources, proper protocols, or capacity.

Today, Zithulele is a beacon of quality care and dedication, serving a community of more than 130 000 in one of South Africa’s most impoverished areas.

Aside from the Resource Centre, funded by a grant from the Discovery Foundation, the 147-bed hospital boasts a bright new wing and accommodation for nurses, students and staff.

Even so, Dr Gaunt does not underestimate the magnitude of the mission facing him and his team.

“To work rurally,” says Dr Gaunt, “you must have a mindset that is up for the challenge. It’s never easy. But what keeps us here is not our jobs and our salaries. It’s the knowledge that we are able to make

a difference to people and their lives, by treating them with respect, dignity and care.”

Quantifying the level of that difference, senior clinician Dr Liz Gatley points to Zithulele’s successes in the treatment of HIV/AIDS patients, and in bringing the perinatal mortality rate in the maternity ward down by almost half.

“When I came here for my community service in 2005,” says Dr Gatley, “I was struck by how well people work as a team, and by just how much they really care. A hospital is a lot more than just a building.”

But the real success of Zithulele lies in the tangible spirit of compassion and can-do that pervades this place.

Founded on faith, built on skill and determination, poised between the hills and the sea, Zithulele harbours the promise of a healthier tomorrow.



IMAGES MARC SHOUL