

THE SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY OF TRAVEL MEDICINE
PROJECT MANAGER'S REPORT 2021

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PROJECT MANAGER'S REPORT 2021

This report will cover the period from the previous Annual General Meeting that took place in October 2020. It will also provide a few suggestions for 2022.

1 THE YEAR IN REVIEW

'The time has come,' the walrus said, 'to talk of many things: of shoes and ships - and sealing wax - of cabbages and kings'

Lewis Carroll

Indeed, it is time to talk of many things, but there is one event that has eclipsed it all.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to wreak havoc. As it continues, and decisions of the authorities are challenged, questioned and lambasted. Challenges that appear insurmountable, emerge. No one has escaped unscathed. It is definitely not business as usual and even the new model does not find favour where most business is conducted on-line and in a virtual boardroom, home, school and conference centre. Face-to-face meetings are neither condoned nor encouraged.

Despite the difficulties, SASTM has remained resolute and robust, but has been hurt financially. The inability to hold the Travel Medicine Course and the Pan African Travel Medicine Conference in 2020 had a serious impact on income. The income generating opportunities all but dwindled during that year, but SASTM, through the hard work of the Executive, has remained a viable and strong Society.

In my opinion, the one most important aspect that enabled it to do so is the full-time office that SASTM operates with Marion Blewett providing an ever-present face of the Society to its members. SASTM, during the past five years, has been ably led by its President, Lee Baker: strong leadership is pivotal to ensuring that SASTM emerges victorious.

The ability to hold a face-to-face Update meeting in March paid dividends and the Travel Medicine Course held in May, at a new venue (the Bytes Conference Centre closed to outside events), once again affirmed the important role of SASTM in the field of travel medicine education.

The decision to host the present PATMC at Skukuza was taken late in May and the sterling, unceasing work of Lee Baker, Albie de Frey and Marion Blewett with the commitment of the Executive, has resulted in what will be an unforgettable Conference that will remain etched in many minds for years to come.

2 PROJECT MT EVEREST

SASTM needs to continue its growth – and attain new heights. To do so, a template is necessary. To achieve this I have used the following, which I will briefly address:

1. The four goals of size
2. The building of bridges
3. Education
4. Publications

2.1 The four goals of size

2.1.1 To retain and increase the membership base

This will be covered by Lee Baker in her report. That SASTM has retained its members is commendable and an incredible achievement.

2.1.2 To ensure financial stability

This has been a challenge. Due to the pandemic, SASTM was unable to hold the Travel Medicine Course and planned Conference in 2020. Through wise investment of funds, SASTM is able to continue its operations and the funds so used must be recouped. New methods of generating income must be put in place so as to avoid a similar occurrence.

Presentations from the Update and selected presentations from the Travel Medicine Course were earmarked to be made available, at a fee, to those who wished to access them. The purpose of this venture was to provide material for members (and those of the Pan African Travel Medicine Federation) and additional income. This did not materialise, for various reasons, and presentations from future meetings should be made available on the same basis.

2.1.3 To increase and retain the industry base

The pandemic has resulted in the industry operating differently and independently. This is noticeable through the countless number of webinars that are offered on a daily basis by the industry. No longer does the industry need to engage with societies to reach its members – it does this easily through electronic media, hosting webinars that fit in with their products and speakers, usually of their choice. A physical presence is no longer a necessity, thereby avoiding the cost of exhibiting and deploying representatives at a conference.

Face-to-face meetings with the pharmaceutical industry, which were an integral part of ensuring the industry was informed of SASTM's activities and projects, were no longer possible. Attempts to arrange virtual meetings were unsuccessful and email correspondence did not elicit, in most instances, a response.

2.1.4 *To increase visibility of SASTM*

SASTM is profoundly visible to its members through the various benefits that are provided. The posting of information on *Telegram* has been interesting to follow and does provide another medium of disseminating information and encouraging member engagement.

SASTM had a wonderful exposure at the CISTM in Washington in 2019 and a planned exhibition at the Asia Pacific Conference was thwarted by the pandemic.

It is hoped that SASTM will continue to have a presence at future conferences outside South Africa.

2.2 **The building of bridges**

Relationships matter, and those that have been developed, need to be nurtured and new relationships formed. This is difficult as face-to-face meetings were not possible.

2.2.1 *The International Society of Travel Medicine*

Two Executive members, Lee Baker and Albie de Frey, serve on professional and interest groups within the ISTM. Salim Parker is the Africa member of the ISTM Liaison Committee and thus a presence of SASTM within the ISTM continues. The value of this is evident by the presence of Lin Chen, immediate Past president, at the Skukuza Conference.

2.2.2 *IAMAT*

SASTM continues to administer two scholarships provided by IAMAT, which results in additional income for the Society.

2.2.3 *DOH*

Liaison with the Department of Health has not been easy as their focus has been on other matters.

2.2.4 *SANCB*

This relationship has proved invaluable. SASTM is fortunate to receive a grant from the SANCB for the PATMC Conference.

2.3 **Education**

2.3.1 *Travel Medicine Update: Sandton Sun March 2021*

This was a successful event and proved that face-to-face meetings cannot be substituted by virtual meetings.

2.3.2 *Travel Medicine Receptionists' Workshop: May 2021*

This Workshop was held the day before the Travel Medicine Course and proved to be extremely successful. It envisaged that these workshops will continue.

2.3.3 Travel Medicine Course

A course, held under very different and difficult circumstances, was successful. The hard work of Albie de Frey, Mary Ross as the course-co-ordinators is recognised, as is the work of Marion Blewett.

2.3.4 SaNTHNet

SASTM received the second of the third grant due from Sanofi. The grant extends over a period of three years, and the funds from this grant need to be used as outlined below:

	2020	
	Monthly	Annual
Administration	2,100	25,200
Hosting (GAMCO)	520	7,100
Reports (quarterly)		3,500
VERS reports and data integration		10,880
Website development		45,500
TOTAL		92,180

The website did undergo some changes and VERS was moved onto its own platform. No reports have been forthcoming as travel clinic activity due to the lockdown period has been limited.

The third grant is now due and application for this grant should be undertaken.

2.3.5 PATMC: SKUKUZA OCTOBER 2021

This Conference will be most successful. The determination of Albie de Frey and hard work of Lee Baker, Marion Blewett and the Executive, has paid dividends resulting in what will be a memorable Conference. Many challenges arose and had to be overcome, the greatest being the limitation of travel on account of the current pandemic. The organising and compiling of a phenomenal scientific programme in the short time period is to be lauded.

Whereas it is somewhat disappointing that delegate numbers are not what one would have hoped for, SASTM has been fortunate to obtain three grants that will help offset the low delegate numbers and thus reduce the financial burden. These are grants from the South African National Convention Bureau, Mpumalanga Tourism and Convention Bureau and an educational grant from Pro Anima Stiftung (through Albie de Frey) for the Inhumanity plenary session.

Turners Conferences came to SASTM's aid as SASTM had not been able to obtain a tax clearance certificate and registration with the Central Supplier Database which is a prerequisite in obtaining a grant from a government institution. Turners submitted the necessary documentation on behalf of SASTM at no cost to SASTM and this needs to be acknowledged.

2.4 Publications

There were no new publications during 2020/2021.

3 THE CRYSTAL BALL OF 2022

SASTM needs to exploit the success of the PATMC during 2022 and to build on its success. The following are some thoughts as I gaze into the next year and beyond.

3.1 SASTM Projects 2022, 2023

SASTM needs a clear roadmap for the next two years and identify projects (some are mentioned below) to be implemented during the two-year period. These would include the newsletters, the Receptionists' Workshop, Travel Medicine Course, future conferences, updates and more. This is a good marketing tool that can be presented to the industry and other role players.

3.2 Building bridges

3.2.1 South African Convention Bureau (SANCB)

The relationship with the SANCB dates back to the ISTM Conference held in Maastricht and is one that must be nurtured. It is essential that this relationship continues as there can still be benefit to SASTM.

A face-to-face meeting with Merryl Fairfoot, Gugu Mchunu and Niko Vilakazi of the SANCB is essential and should take place during November. This will provide an ideal opportunity to convey SASTM's appreciation to the SANCB, report on the PATMC (lessons learnt of organising a conference outside a city centre), and to enquire about future collaboration that could result in grants.

3.2.2 The industry

Face-to-face meetings with the industry should be re-instituted. The Projects for the next two years need to be identified and developed (see Item 3.1) to present to the industry early in the New Year. Regular updating must continue.

3.2.3 Pan African Travel Medicine Federation (see also 3.2.6)

SASTM needs to be a meaningful role player in the activities of the Federation. It is the most powerful Society within the Federation and has resources that could be provided to the Federation. Recordings of Update presentations as well as selected Travel Medicine Course presentations could be made available, as mentioned above, at a cost to all PATMF members.

SASTM is represented by Max Winkler on the PATMC Board and Executive and this can result in an excellent working relationship with the Federation.

3.2.4 The Department of Health

Liaison with the DOH will continue to be a challenge. None the less, the ongoing knocking on their door is essential as at some stage the door will open.

3.2.5 *To retain and increase the membership base*

SASTM exists for its members and thus it is important to have an idea of member's expectations. Direct engagement with members at conferences and updates can be invaluable and events, such as the present Conference, Travel Medicine Course, provide excellent opportunities to interact with members. Understandably, those who are committed to SASTM and its activities will be in attendance yet their input should not be ignored.

There is much debate regarding the benefit of member surveys. The response rate of 10% is what is generally cited, and despite it being low, could be of value and should not be summarily dismissed. I am of the opinion that a well-designed member survey of those who did not attend the PATMC can provide invaluable information in the planning of future events.

Regular communication with members is important and is one that SASTM does well. The Newsflashes, activity on Instagram, all help to consolidate the membership base. It is still important to provide feedback following Executive Committee meetings (this has fallen by the wayside to an extent) as this does provide additional information to members of the activities in which the Executive is involved in order to achieve the goals of the Society.

3.2.6 *To ensure financial stability*

This is of utmost importance. Although it is most unlikely that another pandemic such as the current one will force itself upon us, SASTM needs to develop additional income generating activities. This would include the Travel Medicine Receptionists' Workshop and Updates. Providing recordings of selected Travel Medicine Course and Conference presentations that can be viewed, at a fee, could create opportunities to increase income. These recorded presentations could be made available to members of the Pan African Travel Medicine Federation and thus expand the potential base of those who would wish to access the recordings.

3.2.7 *Publications*

There are two publications that require new editions - *Beyond childhood vaccination* and *The Older Traveller – a Guide for the Health Practitioner*. The latter was done in collaboration with IAMAT and it is my recommendation that IAMAT is approached again to work on the new edition.

3.2.8 *Conferences*

Whether or not the same conference model is used, and the frequency of holding a conference, is an Executive decision. It is acknowledged that the industry will be more difficult to engage in such meetings, and attention should be given to hosting meetings that attract a large number of delegates, thus reducing the overall financial burden.

4 ADIEU

It is time to talk of other things and bid adieu.

As I look back over the seventeen years of my involvement with SASTM, it is with fond memories that I do so. Of the incredible people with whom I have had the opportunity of meeting, both in South Africa and beyond. Of the opportunities and many meetings that were held, of building bridges, producing publications and learning more about this evolving discipline. Of the many challenges and how these were overcome. Of working with amazing people and assisting in bearing the SASTM flag not only locally, but abroad as well. Of SASTM being the key-role player in the development of the Pan African Travel Medicine Federation, and much more. There have been exciting and challenging times (such as the current pandemic) and times no doubt when there has been disagreement.

I convey my sincere appreciation to the Executive, current and past, and the presidents, who gave me the opportunity of working as project manager. I have been fortunate to have worked with committed and dedicated support from Collette Tosen and Marion Blewett – both of whom have provided incredible advice and assistance and without whom much of what SASTM is and does would not have been achieved. I express to them my sincere gratitude and appreciation.

It is indeed now time to talk of other things, of how SASTM can develop into a stronger and relevant Society, a Society that stands head and shoulder above any other. SASTM has a committed and active Executive which few other societies have, and who are passionate about travel medicine. This will be the main function of the incoming Executive who will, I am sure, acquit themselves well of the task and now talk of and develop other things that will be of benefit to SASTM and its members.

I wish SASTM well as it embarks upon the next twenty-one years!

GK Brink
October 2021