

RELEASE: The Copper Development Association Africa climbs on board the Transnet- Phelophepa Healthcare Trains to collaborate on infection control solutions.

Mention the word 'train' in South Africa and immediately the Gautrain springs to mind. Or the trans Karroo and for some, even the luxurious Blue Train, but what very few people know is that there are two trains travelling the South African rails on a daily basis, thirty-five weeks of the year, visiting remote and rural areas of the country. These trains, known as the Transnet-Phelophepa healthcare trains, carry health professionals and vital medication together with health education and knowledge to people who otherwise would never have the opportunity to see a health professional or receive ongoing treatment and life-saving preventative healthcare education.

Phelophepa, meaning 'good clean health' in Sotho and Venda, is owned and operated by Transnet SOC Limited, South Africa's biggest state-owned freight infrastructure giant. Transnet utilises the existing rail network corridor of South Africa to travel to remote communities in South Africa where there is often only a single doctor for up to 5,000 people. This Corporate Social Responsibility initiative of the company sees over 300 000 people a year, who receive much needed comprehensive primary healthcare and basic healthcare education and awareness services.

In a nutshell, what are these trains?

- Phelophepa I and Phelophepa II currently each have 18 coaches and combined, are over 780 metres in length and 1,350 tonnes in weight.
- They travel for 35 weeks of the year visiting a different community every two weeks.
- They are each operated by around 20 resident staff and supported by up to 40 South African student volunteers.

- At every stop, the clinical teams also visit schools and villages to deliver vital health checks, medicines and education to children, the elderly and even prison inmates.

The main services provided are:

- General health, hygiene checks and education.
- Screening for diabetes and high blood pressure.
- Cervical and prostate screening.
- Medication through its on-board pharmacy.
- Dental services through its dental clinic and dental health education including the provision of toothbrushes and toothpaste to children through its community outreach programmes.
- An Eye clinic which includes optometry services and a state of the art on-board laboratory to manufacture spectacles while patients wait.
- Psychological care and counselling.
- School health services.
- An Education clinic which provides training to local health workers and educators.

Phelophepa I was launched in 1994 and Phelophepa II in 2012. The trains are primarily funded by Transnet with F Hoffman-La Roche sponsoring the on-board health clinics and pharmacies, received UN recognition in 2008 for improving delivery of services in rural South Africa.

But, as with all healthcare facilities, especially those that carry a vast volume of human traffic, infection control is an ongoing concern. In 2014, the Copper Development Association approached Shamona Kandia, Senior Portfolio Manager: Health Transnet at the Transnet Foundation who are custodians of the Phelophepa global flagship programme to explore a collaboration between Transnet and the CDAA in respect of the installation of antimicrobial copper touch surfaces to improve infection control measures on-board this world famous, proudly South Africa initiative.

So, what is antimicrobial copper and how will these installations improve the spread of infectious disease on the trains?

An antimicrobial agent is one that kills microorganisms or inhibits their growth. Antimicrobial copper is any copper alloy with a copper content greater than 60%. There are more than 400 different alloys available on the market.

Clinical trials both locally and internationally, have shown that replacing frequently touched surfaces in a healthcare environment with antimicrobial copper helps to reduce microbial contamination by up to 80% depending on the amount of copper installed. Copper's antimicrobial properties remain in effect for the product's lifetime and do not rely on coatings or impregnated surfaces that can wear off or wash away.

During December 2014 and January 2015, 240 antimicrobial door handles were installed in both Phelophepa I and II and, it is planned that during the routine maintenance period starting in October this year and running until January 2016, antimicrobial table tops will be installed and the stainless steel sliding doors currently in place in the kitchens will be replaced with those made of antimicrobial copper.

There can be no doubt that the Phelophepa trains are impacting significantly on the health and wellbeing of the people in rural South Africa and now, with further measures in place to prevent infection, the trains can continue their journey of hope with confidence.

In the words of Shamona Kandia, Senior Portfolio Manager: Health Transnet Foundation, "Phelophepa is about improving not just the health of individuals, but the health of entire communities and this will result in a healthier and more productive South Africa."

About the Copper Development Association Africa

The Copper Development Association Africa has represented the local copper industry since 1962. On behalf of its members, the organisation is committed to promoting and expanding the use of copper and copper alloys throughout Africa.

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