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*Equipping Career Development Practitioners*

PROGRAM DIRECTOR: He will tell us why we need to have Career Development Practitioners in South Africa. He is from my hometown, the only province with a surname, KwaZulu-Natal. Anthony Pillay is in the Department of Behavioural Medicine at the Nelson R Mandela School of Medicine in the University of KwaZulu-Natal and in Fort Napier. He holds a Doctor's Degree in Psychology from the University of Natal and a Master's Degree in Maternal and Child Health, from Harvard University. He has been a clinical fellow at the Boston Children's Hospital in the USA and is a visiting Professor at the University of Mauritius, where he also conducts research on depression in women and girls.

PROF PILLAY: You can stop there, it's fine.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR: Is it too long? We're almost finished. Okay, he has published over a hundred papers in journals and books around the world and is also past President of the Psychological Society of Africa. Alright, it's too long. Welcome very much and we hope to learn something from you today.

PROF PILLAY: Thank you and your hometown is much warmer today than Jo'burg.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR: I know, I miss it very much.

PROF PILLAY: Thank you very much for this opportunity to be here and be part of this really amazing event and I want to congratulate Chris and his team, excellent team, for putting together this really long, overdue, initiative. And I wish you well as you go about this initiative. As I've mentioned to Chris previously and as you would have gathered, career development practice is not a specific area of expertise of mine, but I gather that I've been invited and I'm so pleased to have been invited, as a representative of the Psychological Society of South Africa. And of course, there is a very close link between career development practice and psychology in its broader interface.



Just to start with the historical issues regarding career development, particularly in South Africa and I can easily say, as many of my colleagues will, having been part of the situation where we had no career guidance. I kind of stumbled onto my own profession really, accidentally, which is a very sad way to go and I think Janet just mentioned, it would be such a tragedy to be in a job that really you're not happy in. And I think this is where the career development practice profession for the future can help and remedy that situation. So historically really, our situation in South Africa has been, where you had, certainly in the time that I was a child, I knew that there was career development, career offerings and guidance in schools for a privileged few, but it did not apply to masses and as a result, students struggle.

The Deputy Minister talked about the issue of the student dropout rate, which is a very serious problem. Apart from the costs on the education system, there is also very, very serious fallout in terms of the emotional devastation that results on students finding themselves in the wrong careers, or in the wrong academic training programs. I'll talk about that in a minute. Similarly, even with people already in the work environment, there's constant need to be made aware of what the options are, of how much change is there in your career, where you may be better suited and where you may currently be in a situation where you're not realising your true potential, so there's just so much that needs to be done.

In terms of the dilemmas facing the young people that I mentioned, we've got to remember and this particular slide reflects some of the work that I'm currently involved in, but in a whole different sphere and that is of adolescent brain development. We know so much more now than we did just even 15 years ago, regarding adolescent brain development. Your 16-year old is not in a position really to make those life-altering decisions regarding career choices, just like they're not able to make decisions in other spheres of their lives and other critical decisions that affect society. And this is the broader question that we look at in some of our research, what is the 16-year old brain really capable of planning? So they really need a lot of guidance in terms of their career planning. The problem with poor career decisions, is that it affects them emotionally, financially and of course it affects national resources.

If we look at some of these very specific emotional sequela of poor career choices and even before getting into the career, we're talking about after high school, getting into a tertiary setting, choosing a course to follow in the hope of getting into some career. Inappropriate decisions there result in very poor emotional stability, low self-esteem is a very big issue – the next slide will show you some of that, feelings of worthlessness, depression, suicidal ideation and we've seen this. I'm hoping that you're all aware of this. If you look at what happened last year in our universities, it's not just only happened last year, this has been going on for a long time, but there was a very big outcry and we were pleased that the students were making very, very clear, their concerns about the mental health issues that they were going through. Depression, suicidal behaviour, I mean that's just the times live slide of the student outcry at Wits, but really every university in our country and in many other universities around the world, we've got student depression being a very, very serious issue. In fact it's so serious that this year at the upcoming psychology conference in September, we've put together an entire symposium just to focus on this.

Now if we look at student depression, not all of it, but a very significant component of the aetiology is related to student adjustment. Had they chosen the right part in terms of their educational choices and future career development and dissatisfaction there. And of course if you find that you're dissatisfied, then you're not going to do too well and if you don't do too well, it starts to make you feel really lousy, really sad, depressed and if you're feeling sad and depressed, then your marks go down even further. So it's a vicious cycle and so again this is an area that a lot of work can be done one.

What are the benefits of formalising a profession? In psychology we went through this about 45 years ago, in this country, many more years in other countries. And the benefits are that it's taken more seriously by the authorities. Consumers start to see the intrinsic value of the profession, professionals start to view their roles more seriously and of course regulation becomes an inherent part of it and regulation is so serious, because regulation incorporates with it, ethics and that's big.

And of course, as I said, then with the regulation and ethics, you start to develop your ethical codes of practices and I know a very big component of the theme for this conference that you've put together, relates to Goal 8 of the United Nations' sustained development goals and that has to do with decent work for all. If we look at the extreme poverty in our country, many people are unaware of their potential. Many are unaware of their income potential and really the matter is of encouraging, innovation, entrepreneurship. Again the Deputy Minister spoke about this a little while ago and of course we need to create jobs.

If we look at career development in schools and something I mentioned right at the outset, is currently minimal, certainly in the public schools and remember that the majority of our children in our country are in public schools. So there's necessary to advocate for career development, career guidance, all of those aspect of your broader profession, to be made standard. Our children need to have access to this and this of course increases the priority of the idea of career decision making. To date it's been too wishy-washy, too much of an informal thing. A child just talks to somebody in the family or a friend or relative about possible careers. They're not necessarily the experts in terms of guidance here. And this way students become more aware of the various options, what careers they are suited to and what are the study requirements and of course what careers they are not suited to.

And of course a big question that I've been asking for a long time is, must everyone go to university? We've got, I think, a problem in our country. With our liberation, has brought, correctly brought the quest for education and the right for education, but there are various different types of education and I think we're missing the boat if, as our young people, every single one of them believes that they've got go to a university. Who is going to fix your car? Who is going to do your plumbing? Remember plumbers earn more than I do. So they are not professions, work spheres to be frowned upon. They're high-income professions, but we've got a whole lot of different options out there and so this is, this last point, there's a question I really believe we've got to interrogate in our country.

Credible practitioners really need to, I think and I know as you will, inform secondary school curricular. I recall one of the things my son said to me some years ago, he's an accountant and when he got to university, he said his lecturers, on the first day said to them, that everything you learnt about accounting at high school, forget about it. That's not what we do. That's not the accounting. So it makes you think, now what on earth did they teach them that for? Because it turns out it's a whole different thing they look at at university and the profession thereafter. That's just one example. So we really have got to be looking at this more as we go through this. And of course the roles of tertiary education and I think there's got to be that link, because that example again shows you that there's no link then between the tertiary education and the secondary education and I think more of that can be done.

But that's very simply what I'm talking about here and in psychology we're trying to drum this and I don't know to what extent we're successful, but I think you know, more and more needs to be focused on this. We need to ensure that we move all of our services, whether it's health services, education, career development practices, into our community, into rural areas, etc, rather than locating everything in urban areas. And it's true, we all want to live in urban areas, there's no doubt about that, but we've got to think that currently about 40% at least of our population, is living in non-urban areas. That might change over time, but the needs out there are great.

In a country that's lacking jobs, we need to do a number of things. We need to restructure our cognitions regarding careers. I talked about that a minute ago. We need to look at less conventional careers. We need to adapt career development practice for Africa and I know that that is part of your agenda, that that is what you want to do. Nearly through. The area that I think that will be high up on your agenda and for me a very big thing in psychology, is that of ethics. We've got to ensure that we're doing good, that we're not doing harm, that we look at how we cost our services, be wary of temptations. These next few points, they are raised, because I just came out recently, out of a disciplinary committee that we had to do for the HPCSA regarding a practitioner who was overcharging by ridiculous amounts.

If I had to tell you, you would fall on the floor; just seriously fraudulent behaviour. It's very tempting and our country, we're at that point where there's been a lot of temptation to steal money at every level. We as professionals, as practitioners, have to guard against that. There are temptations, but we must guard against that. And then finally we need to ensure that we do what we're trained to do. That's another big problem that we're facing in psychology and it gets one into trouble if one starts doing things that we're not trained to do. I would love to do brain surgery, you know. All I know about the brain is where it's located. That's... So we need to be very careful.

So conclusion really, your career development practice, category, registration, profession, is most welcome. On behalf of the Psychological Society of South Africa, I want to offer our congratulations to you. Again to Chris and the team, I think this is amazing what you've done and so we wish you all of the best. We hope that it will be integrated into the broader human services. We certainly look forward to more engagement between our associations and as I said, let's see to how best we can use it to the advantage of rural, the poor and the under-served in our community and thank you.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR: Thank you very much Prof Pillay and what I pick up from your conversation is that when we look at our learners, we need to look at them holistically and not just the decisions they're making, but even their emotional wellbeing, the mental wellbeing and involving their families. So thank you very much from the warm KZN.

The other thing that I wanted to just highlight that you spoke much about, is access. Most of our young people, I remember when we were young, we were asked, what do you want to be when you get older, or what do you want to do when you grow up and most of us had only teaching as an option, we had nursing or police, because we didn't have the information of other options that are out there. So we are very, very, very excited that we have a professional body now that can assist practitioners to give the relevant and the quality information so that you are able to guide our young people in a proper way.