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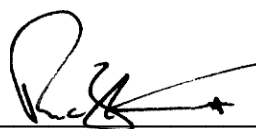
The Executive Committee of the South African Thoracic Society expresses its support to the South African Government in its efforts to mitigate the potentially devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The SA Thoracic Society has championed the campaign to stop cigarette smoking because of its negative impact on health. There is no evidence of any potential benefit of cigarette smoking. We are proud to note that South Africa was among the first countries in the world to ban cigarette smoking in public places. Smoking is the leading cause of lung cancer and chronic obstructive lung disease (COPD). It notes particularly its negative impact on tuberculosis, pneumonia, and influenza. In this context, it supports the view that smoking impacts negatively on the control of the COVID-19 pandemic. Multi-national studies show that COVID-19 outcomes are worse in smokers and they are likely more susceptible because smoking upregulates the cellular attachment sites of SARS-CoV-2, the causative agent of COVID-19.

The act of smoking also impacts negatively on social distancing measures which are the most effective interventions to stem the spread of the SARS COV-2 virus in the community. A reduction in smoking during the lockdown may also reduce second-hand cigarette smoke exposure as smokers confined indoors may smoke in confined spaces. In this respect, The South African Thoracic Society supports the SA Government's position on the ban on the sale of cigarettes and other tobacco products during the lockdown period. The benefits of this intervention outweigh any negative impact.



Prof. U.G. Lalloo



*a/Prof. Richard van Zyl-Smit
Vice-President on behalf of SATS*