May 31 was “World No Tobacco Day” which is an initiative aimed at creating awareness on the impact tobacco has on cardiovascular health. One of the key messages sent out on the occasion was: ‘Smoking not only burns your health, it burns your wealth too’. This is because while the use of tobacco increases the risk of heart diseases, strokes and other vascular conditions, smoking is also an expensive habit both to one’s health as well as the wallet. Sadly, this applies to both active and passive smokers. The Weekly’s Martin Makoni asked the Heart and Stroke Foundation of South Africa (HSFSA) chief executive officer Professor Pamela Naidoo about some of the dangers associated with smoking and what people can do to alleviate them. According to the HSFSA... Excerpts:

To what extent does the use of tobacco contribute as a risk factor to heart diseases, strokes and peripheral vascular diseases? There is sufficient scientific evidence that indicates that tobacco smoking triples the rate of heart disease and doubles the risk of stroke. In fact, tobacco smoking is one of the major risk factors for peripheral vascular diseases as well. And if you are to put that into context, how much does smoking really impact on people’s health particularly here in South Africa and the world at large? Heart disease and stroke are the second-biggest killers in South Africa, second only to HIV/AIDS. At least 80 percent of early deaths caused by heart disease and stroke can be avoided by following a healthy diet, regular physical activity and avoidance of tobacco use. Cardiovascular disease remains the leading killer worldwide, and yet 80 percent of these deaths are preventable.

The Heart and Stroke Foundation SA says smoking doubles the risk of strokes, triples the risk of heart and cardiovascular diseases, and leads to numerous forms of cancer, what’s found in tobacco that causes this?

Tobacco and tobacco by-products have very harmful substances that can be considered both poisons and addictive. Nicotine is the addictive substance in tobacco and it is harmful that you can have nicotine in your bloodstream even if you are not an active smoker but a passive or second-hand smoker who is often in the company of a tobacco smoker.

Smokers generally say quitting is very difficult, but given the health risks attached to smoking, what sort of assistance do you offer to those struggling to quit?

Any form of addiction or excessive use of a illicit or illicit substance is difficult to give up. There are however, health professionals who can definitely help you quit. Do consult your General Practitioner who can assist you with getting the most specialized care within an environment where you will not be judged for your smoking habits.

Some people have turned to e-cigarettes saying they are not as dangerous as the conventional cigarettes, how true is that?

The evidence for the dangers of e-cigarettes is still being gathered although the emerging evidence is that there are harmful substances being used in e-cigarettes. We take the lead from the World Health Organisation who do not condone the use of e-cigarettes. As a protective measure we advise the public not to initiate or continue smoking e-cigarettes.

Are the e-cigarettes as addictive as the conventional cigarettes?

There are traces of nicotine in e-cigarettes which we use ever time will also lead to nicotine addiction.

Some people argue that the negative health effects of smoking can be cancelled out by a healthy diet, who exactly is more at risk with smoking?

This is not accurate. If you are generally healthy and with no other known risk factors but you smoke tobacco, this smoking behaviour remains one of the strongest risk factors for heart disease and stroke or cardiovascular diseases as we commonly call this group of non-communicable diseases.

Besides the health risks of smoking, how much does it impact on one’s financial being?

Smoking is an expensive habit. In a country like South Africa with large pools of communities unable to make ends meet, smoking is a habit that not only depresses you of your health but it detracts you to provide well for your family and loved ones financially. It is always good to do a quick calculation of the cost of a packet of cigarettes (one pack per day) over a 12-month period to give you an estimate of what you can be saving or spending on a more worthwhile item in your personal or family life.

Do people seriously want to know when one smokes or not when taking up a policy, how insurers usually what to know whether one smokes or not when taking up a policy?

Insurers usually what to know whether one is a smoker or not because they will have to estimate the insurance premium that is responsible for business development. We silently economically unsustainable opportunities or businesses in difficulty. A new or detailed business plan is developed and we influence/encourage the business. There is really only one way a business is successful it must make money – every day, every year and be able to grow and expand.

Recently I was given the opportunity to manage something like this. It was a small business that was struggling to get on its feet. We identified the problem and worked with the business team to develop a business plan that was realistic and achievable. The business was able to grow and expand and now has a healthy profit margin. It is this kind of success story that we are looking for when assessing a risk.

When you take up a life policy it is important that and is it a fair practice?

Common sense tells me that when insurers ask such a question they clearly need to know your level of risk for poor health given the fact that tobacco smoking is a known risk factor for poor health outcomes.

The National Health Department has proposed that it wants smoking banned in all public places, do you find this reasonable and how much do you think this could help in reducing the health risks associated with smoking?

Absolutely reasonable. There are an estimated 600 000 women who die from second hand smoking exposure to tobacco in the environment (passive smoking). This is a good public health measure on the part of the National Department of Health.

Young people normally take to smoking because they find it ‘cool’. Is there a point they could be missing regarding smoking and what will be your message to them?

Young people are at the forefront of change so I encourage them to mobilise and live the motto of the global theme: Let’s create a tobacco-free generation. It is not cool to die from a stroke or heart disease, or get cancer in your 20s or 30s. This is what tobacco smoking will eventually lead to. Young people should do what they are good at by the agents of change and create a smoke-free South Africa.

Reasons why Recycling in Jhb should work

Recycling is “the right thing to do”! One can add any number of exclamation marks after that comment depending on who you are hearing this from. A better question to ask is “Is recycling bad or a wrong thing to do?”. I don’t proclaim to be an expert in recycling, but have exposure to the industry as a result of my career. I used to drive to the local glass and paper depot. However, like became how I recycle when it is easy. The definition of easy: Can I put the bag with glass in the cub? I don’t like to sort it, as it get confused. Can I put a magazine in if it has staples in, what about all the other items?

The Johannesburg system that I am exposed to is very simple. Paleblue plastic bags are dropped in the street every week. We get a bag for every bag that we fill. The images on the bag clearly state what is allowed on the bag. Everything from small electronic equipment (broken toaster, computer etc) through to the usual suspects – paper, plastic (all types) and glass. This has been in operation since I moved to Johannesburg six years ago. At least eight out of 10 households in the street use the bags. So one pays for this service. I imagine that this was a pilot for the roll out planned in July 2018. I am a member and a shareholder in a group that is responsible for business development. We silently economically unsustainable opportunities or businesses in difficulty. A new or detailed business plan is developed and we influence/encourage the business. There is really only one way a business is successful it must make money – every day, every year and be able to grow and expand.

Recently I was given the opportunity to review a business in the recycling industry (primarily focused on plastic). This has given me a better understanding of the economic drivers behind the growth in the industry. There may be complex but essentially the recycling industry must make money to be sustainable. Plastic pellets of various types are typically trialled for use when imported. At the lowest level goods collected by the waste pickers/collectors is around R1-R2/kg or R1,000-R2,000 per ton. The difference has to cover capital costs and labour, from receipt back into a small plastic pellet (think cut pellets in store). One of the biggest expenses is the cost to transport material is favorable to material for recycling during the sorting process (it is too dirty and smelly). The other killer in the recycling industry is the cost of logistics. Your household waste goes to a sorting facility. It is separated into different product streams. This will have reverse belts and baling machines and vehicles. The bales are taken to specific product companies (each type of plastic potentially goes to a different place). The plastic recycler converts this plastic into pellets. The pellets are sold to converters who turn this back into products (garden cool độc, toilet seats, plastic benches etc).