

COVER STORY

MARISA HENDERSON

*Wellness Leader Helping
People Heal and Thrive*



Mental health awareness is a crucial aspect of our well-being. In the past few years, there has been a rise in mental health conditions due to an increasingly fast-paced lifestyle. Mental health conditions can have a substantial effect on all areas of life, such as school or work performance, relationships with family and friends, and the ability to participate in the community.

Depression has emerged as a common health issue and a leading cause of disability and underperformance. Despite progress in some countries, people with mental health conditions often experience stigma, discrimination, or even severe human rights violations. It is essential to increase awareness and reduce stigma around mental health, increase access to quality mental health care and effective treatments, and identify new treatments or improve existing South Africa treatments for all mental disorders. South-African based Mondia

Health is doing just that – offering treatment options and raising awareness.

Mondia Health offers treatment and support for people struggling with mental health and addiction challenges. All people go through difficult times at some stage and the team believes that – “It is OKAY not to be OKAY and ask for help”.

Led by its CEO, Marisa Henderson, Mondia Health exists to make it possible for psychiatrists, psychologists, and other clinicians to combine their efforts efficiently and effectively. In doing so, they aim to consistently achieve good outcomes for people brought into their system. Their goal is to offer people a treatment program/services and environment that supports and builds on their mental well-being. They strive to cater to the specific and unique needs of the population that they serve and therefore have the concept of wellness at their core.



*Those Who have a
'Why' to live, can bear
with almost any 'How'*
– Viktor E. Frankl



Wholesome Wellness

Wellness, explains Marisa, is a multidimensional concept that encompasses eight dimensions. These dimensions are interconnected and influence each other. They are:

1. **Emotional Dimension:** Understanding and respecting your feelings, values, and attitudes; constructively managing your emotions.
2. **Physical Dimension:** Caring for your body to stay healthy now and in the future; recognizing the need for physical activity, healthy foods, and adequate sleep.
3. **Social Dimension:** Maintaining healthy relationships, developing friendships, and contributing to your community.
4. **Intellectual Dimension:** Growing intellectually, valuing lifelong learning, and expanding knowledge and skills.
5. **Occupational Dimension:** Preparing for and participating in work that provides personal satisfaction and life enrichment.
6. **Financial Dimension:** Managing your resources to live within your means, making informed financial decisions and investments, and preparing for short-term and long-term needs or emergencies.
7. **Environmental Dimension:** Understanding how your social, natural, and built environments affect your health and well-being.
8. **Spiritual Dimension:** Finding purpose, value, and meaning in your life with or without organized religion.

Marisa and her team believe that if they work together and share the same approach, values, and behavior, they are in the fortunate position to make a difference in every person's life they treat. It will lead to changes in how people think and behave in their communities, thus also contributing to creating a change in the country to enable people to have a better understanding of themselves as well as other people, be more equipped to handle situations, and make better choices to thrive. As Marisa says "Choice is the one thing that nobody can ever take away from you. We all make thousands of choices each day, both consciously and subconsciously". Between stimulus and response there is space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom, according to Viktor E. Frankl.

What matters most for Mondia Health is for people to have the opportunity to thrive instead of just surviving day by day. This entails equipping them to manage and take responsibility for their challenges, together with their support system. They offer services to individuals with a variety of diagnoses and stressors which include but are not limited to bi-polar

disorder, depression, anxiety disorder, burnout, trauma or loss, PTSD, substance abuse disorders and other addictions. Programs include in-patient, out-patient, Corporate Care and Aftercare to create a continuum of wellness services according to individual needs.

A lot of therapies focus on getting rid of sadness, anxiety, anger, etc., but that does not produce a happy person, it leaves a person empty. Hence the team is focused on building skills that improve relationships and enhance meaning and engagement in life. This creates the platform for change as the



At Mondia we talk about "wellness" a lot because it is a concept that is at the heart of our approach and enables us to provide a continuum of care to our patients and support them.



focus is on building enabling circumstances of life that can foster a wellness lifestyle.

Choosing her Path

A nurturer at heart, Marisa wants the best for everyone – something that has both been her best friend as well as worst enemy over time. She has always liked to help other people, assisting them in solving problems, dealing with issues, and supporting them. After completing her studies as an Occupational therapist in 2004, Marisa worked in various areas

including Namibia to gain experience and figure out which field she wanted to settle in. She returned home from Namibia and started working as a locum at a Mental Health facility.

She presented sessions daily and saw the difference it made in people's lives to gain a better understanding of who they are, where they fit in, what challenges they face, as well as which strengths they possess. She believes that by utilizing a wellness model, people have the opportunity to learn effective coping skills and take joint responsibility for their healing

Change does not have to start with great things – know what you want to achieve and then take small steps in the right direction. Be bold about your intention and soft in your daily actions.

“KEEP DOING WHAT YOU DOING”



process, which enables more permanent change and the ability to thrive instead of just survive.

In 2013, the facility where she worked was bought by Riël du Toit, who owned various hospitals - physical rehabilitation as well as mental health in the country, and that is where her journey of growth and development took on a new level.

Marisa has always believed that people should not walk around with a “label” or diagnosis, something that happens so often in our society. When people are admitted into a hospital, there is an immediate mindset change for themselves, as well as for the people in their environment due to stigma and a lack of awareness and understanding. “For anyone to believe that they have the potential to thrive, instead of just survive day by day, they need to know and understand WHO they are. They have an IDENTITY, a NAME, ROLES, and RESPONSIBILITIES, they are NOT their diagnosis. They still have to go back and FUNCTION in their environment, it does not matter what race, culture or background they come from – EVERYONE deserves the opportunity to be happy and fulfilled,” she asserts.

Marisa started her journey to incorporate a Wellness approach into their programs to combat stigma and a lack of awareness and understanding when people are admitted into a hospital. “I believe in coaching and allowing people to get to their own

answers, develop and grow to their full potential – this road is much more organic and sustainable than micromanaging or trying to “fix” everything for people. I think this quote from John C. Maxwell probably describes it best “Leadership is not about titles, positions or flowcharts. It is about one life influencing another,” she says.

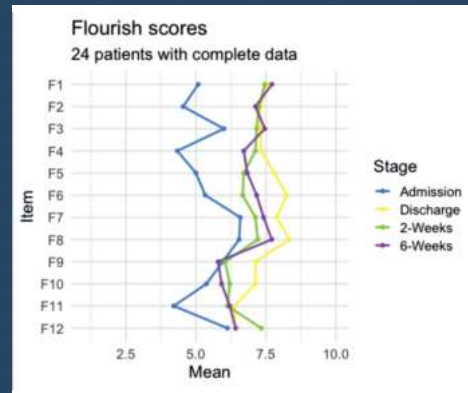
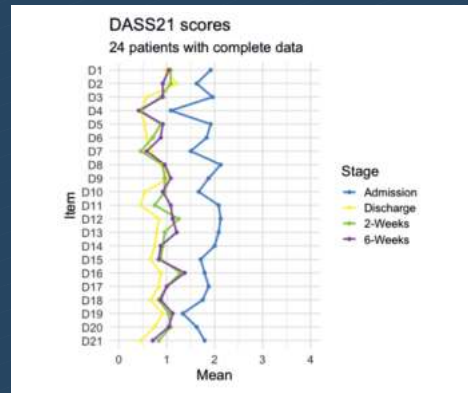
New Role, New Goal

With the formation of Mondia Health in 2020, Marisa was appointed as the COO and started to grow and develop her facility managers at each of the group's 5 facilities. She decided to appoint people with a clinical background as facility managers, as she believes that people can be taught the financial aspects of a business, but understanding people and having the inclination to connect and engage with people is key to being successful. “Developing our Leadership team, I believe is one of the biggest accomplishments as well as compliments. A team is only as strong as its weakest link, and creating a strong team that is aligned and functional, not only makes my role easier but also enables us to reach and assist more people,” says Marisa.

She has now been appointed as CEO and aims to continue building on some of the key aspects of her role as COO. These include implementing a performance appraisal system for employees based on their values and the GROW model, shaping the culture of the organization, and driving core values to be displayed in employee behavior.

Marisa and her team has started to create an online platform that captures all aspects of the patient journey, streamlining the interdisciplinary team process. This IT platform collects and stores information about the patient journey, from the moment of referral to admission, discharge, and continued care afterward. This will enable an environment where the patient is put in the middle to optimize the therapeutic journey. “I want to leverage the use of AI and technology more in the mental health environment for training and development as well as improvement of the patient experience, which is one of our next projects,” she shares.

They also started measuring patients progress with the DASS21 and Flourishing measure from admission to discharge, as well as 2 weeks and 6 weeks post-discharge since 2019. “It is important for me to see if patients gain knowledge and use skills they have learnt AFTER discharge, as that is where change happens. Let's face it, the majority of patients feel better during admission, as they receive rest, attention, support, medication, etc. BUT what happens when they go back to their environment is where the importance lie.”



The data shows that patients in our programs show progress from admission to discharge, then at 2 weeks, there is a bit of a decline, which is realistic given the fact that they are back in their environments and need to start functioning again. However, at 6 weeks, it shows an improvement again, which indicates that skills are being used and change is happening. This still needs more research, but it is really exciting data.

Facing her Challenges

Apart from the everyday challenges at work, being a young female and mother in a mainly male-dominated world with a lot of passion and “feeling” philosophies instead of facts and numbers, is another challenge that Marisa has to deal with.

She faces it by focusing on improving her self-awareness and focusing on the bigger vision instead of the perceptions and doubts that often settle in. She also learned to reframe her passion and plans in terminology and action plans that fit the audience to first get their attention in seeing the bigger picture instead of just a lot of “fluffiness”. As Vince Lombardi puts it “Inches make champions”. Small amounts of effort – consistently, lead to big change.

Words of Wisdom

To conclude our interaction, Marisa parts with the following advice for the young entrepreneurs quoting

This verse was given to me more than 15 years ago “Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

And I am still taking on every day, one step at a time...in faith.

Ullie-kaye. She says:
Consider your Comfort zones –

“In your heart of hearts, you already know. Do not question the still, small voice that is telling you which way to go. You are afraid because things will be different, and feel different, but then again, you are braver now than you were back then and you have learned that strength does not grow from comfort zones. It grows from thorns and high tides and wild wild winds that knock you off your feet.”

Rapid Fire

1. **How would you sum up your 2023:** Wild ride with highs and lows, but unlocking so many opportunities
2. **A Book/Audiobook you are currently Reading/Listening:** The Choice by Edith Eger
3. **Your biggest role model:** I always admired my high school principal, Mr Paul Cassar for his ability to connect with students – focusing just on you when talking to you. Making us feel important by remembering details about us as well as our names. It has always stuck with me.
4. **Success to you is:** When lying in bed at night, just before falling asleep, and feeling content that you have added value to someone's life that day

THE CORE TEAM

A bit more about Mondia Health’s leadership team:

Francis Mouton - Commercial Executive



- a. **Professional Background:** Qualified as an Occupational therapist, appointed as one at Mondia, and then promoted to therapy program manager before becoming the commercial executive
- b. **Biggest lesson since becoming a Commercial Executive:** You can do so much more than you think – you need to think in the big picture.
- c. **What prompted you to take on this position:** It was an opportunity to grow and some people believed in me and that I would be able to do what is needed.
- d. **Aspirations in the next 2 years:** I want to enable myself to bring even more to the table. I want to (if possible) enroll to do an MBA with a specialization in Finance & Accounting.
- e. **Advice to young people:** Know what you stand for



Simonè Jordaan – Facility Manager at Sunnyside in Port Elizabeth

- a. **Professional Background:** Worked as an occupational therapist at Mondia Sunnyside from 2019 to 2021. Became the Therapy Program Manager at Mondia Sunnyside in 2020. Acted as the Facility Manager at Mondia Sunnyside in 2021 and was permanently appointed in December of 2021.
- b. **Biggest lesson since becoming Facility Manager:** Do not take things personally. People act on their perceptions of a situation, and it has very little to do with you as a person.
- c. **What prompted you to take on this position:** At the time it was an opportunity that came across my path. One of my top values is learning and I enjoy a challenge, so this was an easy decision – but a difficult journey with lots of growth. And I had a support system that believed that I could do this.
- d. **Aspirations in the next 2 years:** Breaking the stigma of mental health challenges. I want people to know that there is help available from people who understand – we have walked the journey in our own lives, and we will continue to walk that journey with you. I want Mondia Health to become synonymous with the help available to people who need assistance with mental health and addiction challenges.
- e. **Advice to young people:** Be the change you want to see and lead by example. Your actions do speak louder than words. Treat people with respect – always. Find a person's strength and tap into that - Make them feel seen and valued. This creates an environment where people don't feel they come to work because they have to but come to work because they want to.



Lorindi Steenkamp – Facility Manager at Dihlabeng in Bethlehem

- a. **Professional Background:** Started with Mondia Dihlabeng Wellness Centre in 2018 as a Junior Occupational Therapist. Worked as the Therapy Program Manager at the same facility, managing the group therapy program. Promoted to Facility Manager in 2023. As an Occupational therapist, I have a passion for Functional Capacity Evaluations as well as Psychiatric Functional Capacity Evaluations. I believe that my background has helped me to manage with a different approach, always keeping in mind the real person – where a problem comes from, and how to work and lead the team by always keeping in mind the connection with the patient, staff, and service provider.
- b. **Biggest lesson since becoming Facility Manager:** The biggest lessons learned are that communication is key and trust and confidence in each team member's profession/position is essential for a team to function optimally. This allows each member to be heard and gain respect
- c. **What prompted you to take on this position:** I believe the opportunity was God's timing. I felt confident that I could do the job because I knew I would not be alone. At Mondia Dihlabeng, there is a strong leadership team with two ladies being strong in their own departments. Together, they add unique skills and personality traits to the leadership team. The management of Mondia Health truly supports and uplifts their employees and has trust in them.
- d. **Aspirations in the next 2 years:**
 - To establish good, healthy relationships with the referring resources in and around Mondia Dihlabeng.
 - To work hard to put our name out there – to become the preferred Mental Health center/hospital in our region.
 - To start the process or obtain a license for dual diagnosis.
 - To establish a program with the school educators with the assistance of our corporate care therapists.
- e. **Advice to young people:** Never underestimate your abilities and capabilities. Trust your inner “you” – know your worth and do not be afraid to make mistakes, as long as you will learn from them.



Kerry Mans – Facility Manager at Vereeniging:

- a. **Professional Background:** Studied Speech Therapy and Audiology and started a career as a speech therapist working in the adult rehabilitation section. Moved on to become the rehabilitation program manager and then the facility manager. Love working with people and seeing them grow and reach their full potential. Took that into the leadership roles and embraced the similarities.
- b. **Biggest lesson learned since becoming an Facility Manager:** The importance of your own self-awareness. Self-aware leaders are more able to recognize and manage their own emotions, which can help them respond better to difficult situations and conflicts. Self-aware leaders are more likely to be perceived as authentic, fair, trustworthy, and credible by their employees. This can improve their ability to lead and manage others as they are better able to react to challenges or change in positive, less disruptive ways.
- c. **What prompted you to take on this position:** I took on the position of Facility Manager o that I could make a difference in our facility. From working in different roles in the facility, I saw where I could make a change and where my skill set might be of use so when the opportunity came up, I put up both hands.
- d. **Aspirations in the next 2 years:** My aspiration for the facility manager role for the next 2 years is to be intentional about developing the leaders around me. I want to know that if I am worked out of a position, that the leaders around me completely outgrow me! Instead of only focusing on business and financial growth, if we focus on growing the leaders around us – the natural result will be financial growth. The difference is that others will be growing the business far beyond one person growing it on their own only using their limited skill set.
- e. **Advice for young people:** Whatever you do, do it with all your heart. So many people want to grow without working hard at what they have in front of them. Once you work hard, you can learn about the power of influencing others. By working hard, you will get noticed for the right reasons.



Maritsa Naudè – Facility Manager at Woodlands in Bloemfontein

- a. **Professional Background:** Completed Master's degree in social work in 2012. Worked as a social worker at SANCA Aurora Alcohol and Drug Centre from 2007 to 2014. Worked as a Therapy Program Manager at Nurture Woodlands from 2019 to 2020, and was promoted to Facility Manager in 2020.
- b. **Biggest lesson since becoming Facility Manager:** Never lose your connection with people. Consistency is key.
- c. **What prompted you to take on this position:** I always wanted to take care of people on an emotional level. What a privilege to practice this every day toward my employees.
- d. **Aspirations in the next 2 years:** To be the best mental health facility in South Africa. To break the stigma about mental health and to ensure that more people can access our treatment and services.
- e. **Advice to young people:** Never doubt yourself. Set realistic goals. Be driven. Anything is possible.



Varsha Pillay – Facility Manager at Umhlanga

- a. **Professional Background:** Qualified as a Registered Nurse in 1996 from the Addington College of Nursing in Durban. After working at various private facilities as a registered nurse, left mainstream nursing after sustaining a work-related injury fracturing the spine. Worked as an office-based case manager at one of the leading private hospital groups in the Billings Department. Also worked as an in-house clinic nurse at an apparel company and later worked at an Occupational Health company. Employed at M-Care Umhlanga in 2012 and became the Nursing Unit Manager for Nurture Umhlanga when the Nurture Care Group took over the hospital in 2015. The hospital changed its name to Mondia Umhlanga in 2020. Have the privilege of managing the hospital and still having patient contact and not losing touch with the nursing skillset which has contributed to being grounded and humble in an ever-changing business world.
- b. **Biggest lesson learned since becoming an FM:** The biggest lesson is to maintain a growth mindset and enable the team to have the same mindset. To be able to take on constructive criticism as such and use it as a building block to grow. Group dynamics will always change, but there must always be a “constant”. The constant passion for providing safe, quality care to our patients and as a result building a solid, open, and transparent trust relationship between us, the psychiatrists and psychologists.
- c. **What prompted you to take on this position:** Was offered the position in 2019. Skeptical at first, I realized that I was up for the challenge and this was the next step in my career path. I already knew the daily operations of the hospital and its infrastructure and took that as my biggest advantage. The next step was building positive relations with the admitting psychiatrists and creating a positive work environment for all the staff. We all are professionals but cannot work in silos – team cohesion and positive group dynamics contribute to a positive patient outcome. Happy staff = happy patients
- d. **Aspirations in the next 2 years:** Aim to gain popularity and break the stigma around mental health by targeting teachers and the police force to raise awareness. These facilities are the biggest contributors to the future of our country and face challenges daily. Winning them over and assisting in their mental well-being can create a dynamic shift that would have a positive impact on society as a whole. The hospital plans to expand and accommodate an addictions unit as well as an adolescent unit, continuing to create a safe psychological environment for staff and patients alike.
- e. **Advice for young people:** Reach for your dreams but remain humble and grounded in your mission to accomplish your goals. Your heart and mind do not work in isolation. you are not defined by your failures – every failure is a building block to your success.