



In Conversation with Dr André Rose

August 2026



[Dr André Rose, SAPRIN: Director](#)

In this edition of *The SAPRIN Connection* we speak to Dr André Rose, newly appointed Director of the [South African Population Research Infrastructure Network \(SAPRIN\)](#). Roopa Moodley, SAPRIN's Public Relations Manager explores his impressive professional path which has ultimately led him to the field of population research.

Dr André Rose is a medical doctor who qualified with a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery (MBChB) from the University of the Witwatersrand in 1999. André performed well at school and his parents were supportive as he tried to navigate his career choices. He recollects that there was one exception, his parents firmly drew the line when he was contemplating marine biology. "They had this idea of me having to go diving with sharks and possibly dying," recalls André. André experienced a religious epiphany which cemented his desire to serve, and he was driven by a powerful sense of calling to become a missionary doctor.

He went on to obtain a Fellowship of the College of Public Health Medicine awarded by the Colleges of Medicine of South Africa, a Master of Medicine from the University of Witwatersrand and a PhD in Public Health from the University of Free State.

André's transition into Public Health followed a more complex trajectory. "I really enjoyed being a clinician. I did my internship and community service in Kimberley and Alexander Bay in the Northern Cape. I then worked mainly in internal and emergency medicine in the UK. I came back to South Africa with the view of becoming an internal medicine specialist. While waiting for a registrar post to open, I worked in the mines for a while. I think the exposure in the mines shaped my interest in occupational health medicine. I realised that medicine isn't just about the clinical issues but where people work and live has an important impact on how to fix their health," explains André.

He successfully obtained a registrar position and specialised in internal medicine for approximately two years. Frustrated by the systemic issues he was faced with in his work environment, André began questioning how he could contribute meaningfully to the sector. He realised that the solution did not lie with him remaining a clinician. This realisation saw André resign as a registrar, against the advice of mentors and professors, as he made the bold decision to pivot into a career in public health.



While André waited for a Public Health registrar position to become available, he went back and worked for the National Health System in the United Kingdom. He returned to South Africa and took up employment as a Medical Mine Officer at AngloGold Ashanti providing preventative care, occupational health care and acute medical care to the mining community at one of the largest underground gold mines in the world.

He subsequently became a Public Health registrar at the University of Witwatersrand and Gauteng Department of Health. Here he was responsible for hospital management, multi-disciplinary research and capacity building and multi-stakeholder collaborations. André moved on to the role of Public Health Technical Specialist at the Health Systems Trust.

Reflecting on his transition to public health, André says that a question he often gets is, “Do you miss being a clinician?” He clarifies that there is a widespread misconception that moving into public health means stepping away from being a doctor. While there may no longer be a stethoscope around his neck and a patient sitting in front of him, he emphasises that his patient can be an entire community, city or country.

André encapsulates the depth of being a Public Health Specialist as, “You are still taking the skill you develop as a clinician and you look at how you apply it to a patient that you may not necessarily see or touch. The patient communicates with you in different ways. It’s about hearing how the patient speaks in terms of the data and observations that we see and then how that system responds. I see it very much like you would see an individual, there is a certain physiology and pathophysiology about the patient in public health.”

André moved on to the University of the Free State in a public health medicine specialist capacity. However, this role also saw him become a senior lecturer. During his tenure at the University of Free State, he played a crucial role in teaching, curriculum development, and the management of the Department of Community Health.

Capacity development and youth empowerment are core to André’s leadership values. He holds an honorary lecturer position at the Nelson Mandela University. André champions SAPRIN’s Nodal PhD Fellowship which currently has three students in various stages of their studies. He also supports a collaboration between SAPRIN and the Africa Health Research Institute (AHRI) to expose learners to the AHRI laboratory during the South African Medical Research Council’s (SAMRC) Generation Science Youth Job Shadow Programme. He has and continues to provide academic research supervision and mentorship to numerous students.

André has held the position of Deputy Director at SAPRIN since 2022 and served as the interim Director from 2025. During this period, André played a key role in guiding and developing the 2025–2030 SAPRIN Strategic Plan. He managed the annual budgeting processes and acted as a vital liaison with various stakeholders, providing leadership and mentorship to his team.

André elucidates that the importance of SAPRIN firstly lies in its underlying longitudinal methodology, rather than cross sectional surveillance. Forging lasting relationships between communities and scientists is crucial and continues to emerge, creating the opportunity for active citizen science to happen. He explains that SAPRIN’s strength lies in bringing together a network of HDSSs, applying the same methodologies and producing a harmonised dataset that allows for comparisons between the various nodes. André explains that it allows us to be able to make inferences about findings in similar situations. He does explain that while it is by no means representative of the country but offers representation of the socio-economic types of communities that exist in the country and we are able to look at how findings could be generalised and transferred to similar

populations within the country. A significant advantage of SAPRIN is that it allows for other studies besides the HDSS data that is collected, to be built on the network at a reduced cost. André surmises that with funding cuts this becomes an attractive alternative.

He cites the establishment of the seventh SAPRIN Health and Demographic Surveillance System (HDSS) node, BAMBISHO in the North West province as a highlight during his time at SAPRIN. André describes it as a steep learning curve that while enjoyable forced him to re-evaluate every aspect of HDSSs. He expressed gratitude for the experience as it has helped shape how he thinks about population science and how to use it to build on public health in South Africa.

Speaking about the challenges he encountered at SAPRIN, André said that the nodes are led by very accomplished and senior leaders. Some of his challenges hinged around still understanding his role at SAPRIN, while sometimes having to challenge more senior people, sometimes professors that taught him as a student.

“Being able to carve my own identity without being too influenced by the ideas and thoughts from the previous or some leadership in nodes and SAPRIN while maintaining a sense of authenticity and trueness to myself was another challenge,” stated André.

André has held several notable leadership roles, including serving as President and Treasurer of the Public Health Association of South Africa (PHASA). He currently sits on the editorial board of the Journal of Occupational Health Southern Africa and is part of the organising committee of the World Federation of Public Health Associations for the upcoming 18th World Congress on Public Health.

He completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the National Cancer Institute in the USA, where he represented the Fellows Committee and contributed to diversity and transformation initiatives. His global experience includes serving as an exchange student at IS Global, the Institute for Global Health in Barcelona, and serving as a Fellow of the Salzburg Global Seminar. He is also a recent alumnus of the Kofi Annan Global Health Leadership Programme, which aims to develop senior health leaders in Africa.

André’s career thus far has been illustrious. His dedication and passion to serving the public shines through. He has overcome numerous hurdles to get him to where he is today. He shares that the greatest setback he experienced was 14 years ago – when the unimaginable happened, he suffered a stroke. He narrates that he was on the verge of starting his PhD when everything came to an abrupt halt. The long and arduous journey of rehabilitation saw him take six months off from work. André shares that the mental battle of repositioning himself and finding where worth lies and what was important was a difficult journey.

“A year after I had the stroke, I got the opportunity to do the PhD. For the next three and a half years I worked on the PhD. The PhD suddenly took on a very different feel. Graduating from the PhD felt like a really significant achievement for me. To be able to overcome that and to still achieve academically and do really good work in the PHD was a really important achievement for me. That struggle also deepened my faith in God. It was a turning point for many things – in terms of how I think of life, people, work etc. That epiphanic moment of rethinking what really matters in life is significant for me,” said André.

Beyond his professional accomplishments André is an award-winning photographer and artist. He is a visual activist, using his lens-based art practice to amplify social and public health issues.