

**Inaugural lecture**

# *Professing presence*

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## Abstract

I agree with the view of Noll (1997) and Clasquin-Johnson (2014) on what it means to be a professor, namely that being a professor is a call to action. The professor focuses on understanding, gaining insight, reflecting on the significance of knowledge, and organising knowledge in such a way that new truths come to light. The professor actively contributes to the recreation of knowledge of the subject field and acts as a catalyst between research and teaching, creating new contents. The professor focuses on, lives and breathes her area of interest. In other words: the professor professes her area of interest.

This view of what it means to be a professor closely links with the spirit of presence, where a relationship is built, and from within this relationship, there is space and freedom for the truth of the care receiver, and of the care provider, to emerge. The definition of presence that is seen as the guiding theory of this inaugural lecture is as follows: Presence is *“a practice where the caregiver relates her/himself to the other in an attentive and dedicated way, by doing so learns to see what is at stake for the other; from desires to fear, and, in connection with this, come to understand what could be done in this particular situation and who she/he can be for the other. What can be done is done. That is a way of doing that can only be achieved with a sense of subtlety, craftsmanship, practical wisdom and loving fidelity”* (Baart & Timmerman, 2021:96).

In line with the theory behind presence, namely, to slow down, listen, reflect and build relationships, and in striving to profess presence, this inaugural lecture took the form of reflective conversations with members of management, experts and post-graduate students. These conversationalists gracefully joined me in professing presence. We discussed ideas about: what is presence, what it is to be a professor who professes presence and why presence is important.

In this document, the different views of conversationalists on being a professor and on presence are marked with source references for further reading and to show how the conversations resemble existing literature. Some of the source references are references to our research on presence, confirming the findings of international research on presence and showing some of the uniquely South African aspects of presence, such as that presence is integral to the caring character of nurses who live in the community where they work and know patients as if they are family.

To view this inaugural address in video format, visit  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-TKqHzXI7g>

## **Words of welcome and introduction**

Welcome guests, I truly hope that this will be a wonderful experience for you. Come and join us in our conversations on presence. First, in honour of God, I would like to open with scripture reading and prayer. I'm reading from Luke 11 verses 33 to 36 where Jesus teaches us to open our hearts for His light so that we can shine our lights in this world. I'm reading from The Passion Translation: "No one would think of lighting a lamp and then hiding it in the basement where no one would benefit. A lamp belongs on a lampstand where all who enter may see its light. The eyes of your spirit allow revelation light to enter into your being. When your heart is open, the light floods in, but when your heart is hard and closed the light cannot penetrate and darkness takes its place. Open your heart and consider my words, watch out that you do not mistake your opinions for revelation light. If your spirit burns with light, fully illuminated with no trace of darkness, you will be a shining lamp reflecting rays of truth by the way you live." May we open our hearts so that God's light can enter our lives so that this light can shine through us. May we be vessels of light and may we practice presence, each of us in our unique way so that we reflect rays of truth by our way of being with others and for others.

Let us pray. "Our Heavenly Father, may the glory of your Name be the centre on which our life turns. May your Holy Spirit come upon us and cleanse us. Manifest your kingdom on earth and give us our needed bread for the coming day. Forgive our sins as we ourselves release forgiveness to those who have wronged us and rescue us every time we face tribulations. Amen" (The Lord 's Prayer, Luke 11:2-4, read from The Passion Translation).

In line with the idea of presence this inaugural address takes the form of reflective conversations where we discuss ideas on what is presence, what is it to profess presence and why it is important. Come and join us in these conversations on presence.

## **Conversation with Prof Awie Kotzé, Executive Dean: Faculty of Health Sciences, and Prof Karin Minnie, Director: Research to improve quality in nursing and midwifery (NuMIQ) research focus area**

*The purpose of this conversation was to reflect on what it means to be a professor, what presence is and why it is important.*

Thank you so much for being here Prof Awie and Prof Karin, it's a privilege to spend this time with you and to reflect on who is a professor, what is a professor and what is presence. My history with being a professor is very short, and when I went for the interview for applying for being a professor I wondered: what is a professor? Together with that, my love for presence is intertwined with being a professor. I, therefore, would love to hear from you what do you think is a professor and what is presence. Prof

Kotzé answered that he thinks a professor is someone who can engage with a subject in both the teaching environment and the research environment. That is somebody who can take old knowledge in a specific subject field to analyze that reflectively, not over hastily, and to put in new pieces of knowledge that have been coming forth from scientists and from scientific activities in certain new places, to reorder the old things and then to integrate these in a very typical way and then, to engage with his or her subject and then to go and carry this body of knowledge over to a class (Noll, 1997).

Prof Minnie commented that Prof Kotzé's reflections are very rich, and added the way that she has reflected on being a professor, to summarize it in a few words is: "Someone that's passionate about a specific issue and subject and then always keeping up to date, being a scholar and also never teaching the same thing in the same way again, always bringing in new things and being enthusiastic about your subject." She emphasised community engagement, taking whatever your passion is to the community and, it can be your community in the sense of your colleagues or the nursing field, so it's also our colleagues in hospitals and academia and the community in a wider sense. So, but it does take reflection, it does take a holistic view. A professor is someone who stands back a bit and sees how things fit together (Noll, 1997, Clasquin-Johnson, 2014) "It's sad in a sense that we are being pressured to produce and even at student-level they must finish in a certain time, and in that time you must just write and do your studies, you don't really have a lot of time and sometimes you must be allowed to make mistakes". So she thinks that this is also linked to presence, in that not always solving the problem but doing the journey and engaging with whatever happens during that time (Noll, 1997). She expressed interest in my journey and said that she has known me for more than 20 years, as a passionate psychiatric nurse, and that I had a journey with pastoral or parish nursing and then developed knowledge about presence and then I found my niche there. Prof Minnie asked that I say how my journey went.

I answered that I think Prof Minnie's question links well with the idea of developing as a professor and reflecting and thinking about, and always taking the next step or perhaps being curious about what's the next step, so to deepen into the subject field (Noll, 1997), as in my case starting with communication, relationship building, linking that to spirituality and faith, seeing how that can make a difference and then getting to the core of what I'm interested in, and that is presence: to really connect with people and to see their side of the story and through that deliver a service, a nursing care service that is tailored to that person's needs. Not to miss that person but to really listen and see who that person is and what all their needs are. Presence is about in itself building a relationship, that's the outcome of presence, it's not necessarily about solving a problem or getting to a specific goal but in itself, it is a true gift to give someone and I would like really to learn more about that and to experience that and to see how it makes a difference.

Prof Kotzé reflected further and shared that knowing that my main research field is presence, he tackled two or three publications on presence but admitted that

sometimes he felt that presence is quite a simple concept but when he proceeded to the next paragraph he realized that it can also be a very complex concept (Finfgeld-Connet, 2006). He understood that it's about an inter-relational environment that is between two persons (Mohammadipour *et al.*, 2017a:4322). He added that nursing is an inter-relational profession, but also a task-driven profession and you will frequently feel the urgency if you walk into a high care unit or in a normal hospital ward. You will also see the urgency with which people are doing their work, and presence is the fact that you connect. So it's not *what* you do it's *how* you do it (Fahlberg, 2016). It made him wonder: how do you as a nurse develop that connection or what can you as a nurse do to get this presence at the end with a certain patient. "I assume it's not possible to have a connection with each and every patient and this is why probably some people will have it with one or two patients but the other nurse will have it with another two. This is where the total concept will come together. Its purpose, I've seen, is to assist in the healing process, but also into the own inter-professional or interpersonal development and to give a sense of belonging for both the patient and the nurse (Tavenier, 2006). But, it should be difficult in the nursing environment being a profession that's busy and running around. So how do you experience that? I know it's a difficult question and maybe there's not an answer, this is why you probably are researching it you know to get answers to these types of questions."

I replied that I think Prof Kotzé mentioned the core of presence, and that is: *how* you are with people and not *what* you do but *how you are*. When you are in the unit, just the fact that you make eye contact and really notice the patient and slow down on your own inside to a place of openness – that does not take extra time. It does take readiness and willingness to have openness, and also, it is an inter-relational process so it also depends on what the patient needs (Mohammadipour *et al.*, 2017b:23). If the patient needs you to perform a task then that is how you are present with the patient. If the patient needs someone to listen to them then that is how you practice presence. It's a living dynamic system, and yes definitely, that is why I am still researching that, because we need to create awareness of how wonderful healing effect it can have and make nurses aware that the answer is already within themselves and that they can make such a huge difference in the life of patients.

I thanked both the conversationalists for professing presence with me and for thinking along. It was a privilege and they inspired me to continue on this journey. They congratulated me and said that they looked forward to seeing more research and to the way how I also bring that into the classroom, how I engage with the subject and the discipline and carry that over to students.

## Conversation with Presence research team members, Dr Khumo Shopo and Mrs Kathleen Froneman

*The purpose of this conversation is to reflect on presence, with presence research team members, who are researching presence in different contexts of nursing and nursing education*

Emmerentia: “We've been part of the research programme in presence from the very beginning and so you are very special guests today. Thank you so much. I remember when we did the research in the rural areas in the North West province (Du Plessis *et al.*, 2018) how much fun we had and how much we also learned to appreciate the nurses working in those hospitals and the work they are doing, teaching us about presence. So, welcome so much, I'm looking forward to hearing your voice and your 'professing about presence' and sharing ideas. Would you kindly tell us: what do you profess about presence?”

Kathleen: “What I profess about presence, for me presence is, actually, in one word: it's a *way of being*. Just being there for someone, just taking the time to actually be in the moment and for me, it's very important. Presence is actually like I said it's *not a way of doing* it's a way of being, so if you start cultivating presence in someone else you're going to make a huge difference in that person's life.” (Brown *et al.*, 2013:E1).

Khumo: “For me being present is, it should come from a genuine place (Turpin, 2014:18). You can never be present with someone without caring and without being genuine. So that is the very first, where I would start to say the person is caring, the person is present, when they have been genuine. So that is my departing point because I've learned that also from those nurses in the rural areas when we're doing that they were genuine and they are caring for their patients despite the circumstances they were in but they were caring so being genuine is a very important aspect of caring and being present.”

Emmerentia: “I so agree with both of you that presence is a way of being and that it's about genuineness. I wonder what you think about those nurses in the rural areas: where did that genuineness come from and how did they learn about a way of being? What are your thoughts about that?”

Khumo: “I think they, remember I spoke about the circumstances they were in, so I think they, because they were part of the community, most of them did say that they are staying around the community, so being part of the community also brings out the genuineness and that caring, because they were caring for people that lives within them, amongst them, and so they were able to show that caring regardless of the fact that they were not aware – because most of them only became aware once we started interacting with them during the interviews that, oh this thing of me sitting with the patient and talking to them and trying to assist wherever I can, either socially or physically, mentally or whatever in a, bringing that wholeness of a healthy being, it means I was caring, it means I was being present with the patient (Tavernier, 2006:154). So they did it without knowing that they were.”

Kathleen: "If you're in the nursing profession, nursing as a profession is a caring aspect so it comes within it comes with experience so and especially nurses you tend not to look only at the patient you look at the patient with the environment all circumstances so you come from a different perspective and just by being yourself and seeing the patient for whom they are it's an automatic behaviour that's going over. Your experience actually tells you which patient needs additional attention, which patient not, so I think that's where the genuineness also comes in. It's with time, with experience."

Emmerentia: "What you both are saying is that it's also about relationships, being part of the community, knowing the people that you are serving and then also born out of your own caring being, that it's part of nursing that we are caring, and also you're saying experience. That reminds me of what you are saying about the craftsmanship (in a previous conversation), about presence, and you say that you are wondering about that."

Kathleen: "With regard to the craftsmanship (Bart & Timmerman, 2021:96) that's a very unique concept to actually define presence. It's about if I take it back now to, in nursing we can say, in the education field, you actually start: think of a piece of clay that you start, you want to model it, you want to actually at the end build something new. So that clay is all your nursing students where you, and not only nursing students, nurses as well, when you start moulding it you transform it into something new and just by doing that, you think of building meaningful relationships with them. In this relationship you need to connect with them to show care, compassion; and just by being open and listening to someone make them feel that they matter, will immediately, I think the end product of that clay model is what resembles the craftsmanship."

Emmerentia: "That's beautifully said, I'm going to remember that image of the clay and I think we all form one another."

Khumo: "That's true. Yes, I was also just thinking as Kathy is talking about the, in essence, it's the contribution that an educator makes on what the end product of this nursing student or even other students can be (Froneman, 2020; Oukouomi Noutchie, Mofokeng, Froneman & Ramalisa-Budeli, 2021). It can also go on to, you know, the nice thing about caring and presence is that it can apply across all the disciplines not only in nursing not only in education, so there is the beautiful part of it, that at the end of the day that clay that you wanted to be a specific model at the end of the day you are contributing towards it by caring and by being present throughout that whole process. Let's say a student who's either in undergraduate or in postgraduate, you go through that processes with them, you put whatever caring and your whole being into assisting the students to model them into being."

Kathleen: "Khums and what you said there, across the disciplines, that's very valuable because if you really think, different schools, if you take a student you don't only have one lecturer, you get in contact with different lecturers, so each one can make a unique contribution. So if we can cultivate presence in the higher education system that

everyone is aware of that, can you think what the end product can be. It's not only in the nursing profession but in the work-life out there we can, everywhere in every circumstance, you can make a difference.”

Khumo: “That's true that's true”.

Emmerentia: “And what is the difference that you think caring presence can make?”

Kathleen: “If you take it to nursing specifically, it makes a huge difference in your patient care. You're going to uplift your patient outcomes, you're going to have happy patients and it's going to contribute to the healing as well because especially if we take now in the Covid-19 pandemic that we're currently in, the patients feel left alone in the hospital, they feel like it's just being the care they receive, the care is not that, I mean how many times the visitors were limited to come and visit them, they were left alone. So the nurses was the only ones they actually had constant interaction with, so if you demonstrate or role model or cultivate presence to the patient they're going to see that their voice matters, they matter as a human being and they're not just a number or a diagnosis in the hospital bed (Beurskens, Van der Linde & Baart, 2019). So that is going to improve your patient's healing, his recovery, but it's also going to make a difference in the nurse's life because at the end what do you want: you want satisfaction, you want to feel that you made a difference in someone else's life and also to add on to that, the outcome that one would want. Let's say from across disciplines these are individuals who are living within communities and the larger society so I think the impact, impacting caring and cultivating that in our students is going to contribute to a larger society at the end of the day. We would find that most of the people or a larger society is having that caring in their being and they're able to also impart it, Remember, you can impart caring consciously or unconsciously through the different interactions that you have with one another.”

Emmerentia: “We are now going to create some more awareness of presence by looking at a few videos of experts talking about presence and learn from them as well.”

## Conversations with Presence experts and researchers in the Presence research programme

*In this section, I present short quotes and inserts by experts in Presence and presence research team members, who are from different disciplines. These inserts contribute to professing presence: what presence is and why it is important. The inserts are from online conversations with the experts, available at the 'Caring presence in nursing' YouTube channel and on the website [www.caringpresence.co.za](http://www.caringpresence.co.za).*

*"It starts all with the decision: for whom do I think that I want to be?"*

*Andries Baart*

**Prof Andries Baart**, an expert on Presence, developer of the Theory of Presence and founder of the Presence Foundation (Stichting Presentie), Utrecht, the Netherlands, talks about asking a patient about their experience of when someone practices presence: "And I think it's a very good starting point: 'What is that experience?' Normally they start with a very easy answer: 'He was listening'. But then I ask: 'But what is listening about?' 'What does he do when he's listening?' And then they say, for instance: 'Well he takes me seriously', or anything like that. And then I have: 'What is it to be taken seriously?' And then, for instance, people say: 'Well he is recognizing my problem, he is not alienating the problem, saying I know better how to call the problem, or he is not robbing my expertise in the field of my problem. He is recognizing that I am experienced in it', and things like that. And then you come, so to say, you are discovering one cover, one cover, another cover and then you come in that, and then say, well now we are at the core. That is what presence is about, it's not just about listening, everybody can listen, but it's about recognizing, being really interested." This view is elaborated on in Beurskens, Van der Linde and Baart (2019), among others.

*"...because I really think it's inside you, that you thought: Yeah, there, that's what we need" Monique de Bree*

**Monique de Bree**, emeritus community pastor, the Netherlands, shares that presence comes from within the care provider: "I do think it starts with yourself, so you have to watch yourself and your life because I think that the drive of me and of many people who will work with a presence approach: it's always your own experience that, you know, maybe that's why you are being a caring person, you want to be a caring person because you know what it means. So I knew that it could be possible to be with them (community members) and I think that for everybody who was working in the caring sector that there is a point in your life that, you know: 'I knew it, I knew that that was the importance to be with somebody', and when you can realize yourself that and thinking about it then you also know what it means to be present for other people." This view is also prevalent in the work of Mohammadipour *et al.* (2017b:23), Engqvist *et al.* (2010:213) and Finfgeld-Connett (2006:711) in the sense that these authors

argue that presence require self-awareness and a deliberate choice to become vulnerable, as a human being, with the care receiver.

*“It’s all about being aware. Let us become aware of presence. It doesn’t cost us anything.” Lillian Kalimashe*

**Lillian Kalimashe**, PhD candidate in the presence research programme, emphasise that presence is about a human-to-human relationship: “I actually believe that that’s more of the foundation of it, or where the truth comes in, to this: the interaction of the relationship more than it or before it’s becoming a nurse-patient relationship it should be a human-to-human relationship, human-to-human interaction. And once that is achieved it’s easier to move to the next level of saying we are now interacting as a nurse-patient but the basis being: it’s two human beings having this relationship that is mutual where no one is above the other.” Emmerentia: “I think you provided a very concrete example and it’s something that I’ve been wondering about, is how to make that shift from nurse-patient to human-to-human and as you say it’s just a question of becoming aware and realizing what is important for the patient and to move from that approach.” Similarly, Kostovich (2012:69) defines presence as “an intersubjective, human connectedness shared between the nurse and the patient”.

*“That’s the goal of caring presence, is to try and understand how do I meet your need in the way that you will understand it” Siedine Coetzee*

**Prof Siedine Coetzee**, Research chair, SANOPSys SARChi Albertina Sisulu Chair in Nursing Science, and expert on compassion, explains that presence is individualised: “So I was speaking to Shane Sinclair this week, just by email, and he’s an expert in compassion and he gave me the most amazing analogy. He said to me that he sees compassion and caring presence, I really think you can use both, is different for every area of the world, right, but we can compare it to cuisine. So Italians we know they like pasta. That’s different in South Africa, right? We do eat pasta but it’s not our main cuisine, but then the interesting thing is when you go to Italy each part of it has a different type of pasta, right, so caring presence, compassion, it’s very individualized. I mean we can’t say caring presence is this to South Africans, we can’t say caring presence is this to nurses, we can say each one has their type of food. Compassion means something different to everyone, and caring presence means something different to everyone. So that’s the goal of caring presence, is to try and understand how do I meet your need in the way that you will understand it, because I can always think: when you’re a mom you can have children in your house you can say you’re spending time with them, right, but you can still be busy cooking or cleaning or packing away that is different than when you actually sit and you look at them and you try and understand them. So for me that is caring presence, is that really that relational building is being present, it’s trying to understand what you need and for me then compassion goes to how do I meet that need and then the response you give, was it

a positive or a negative. Engqvist *et al.* (2010:213), among others, also emphasise that practising caring presence means individualised care.

*“This relationship, makes both of them (the patient and the caregiver), themselves, in the best possible way” Guus Timmerman*

**Dr Guus Timmerman**, a senior researcher at the Presence Foundation, Utrecht, the Netherlands, encourages us to take time to spend with the other person, leading to a deeper understanding and an emergence of the other in the best possible way at that moment: “For example in this research into people with dementia when you take the time to sit next to some person you will see more of her or him as his or her own being, a person and not a body with a mental illness, but being this person as he or she can be in the most, in the best possible way at that moment. When you take your time and you watch carefully, try to understand the other as in some way a competent person with their own reasons to act in a certain way, then you see more and there's more possible and the other is experiencing more to be seen, really seen and really seen as a person worthy of being seen.” These ideas are captured in the definition of presence presented by Baart and Timmerman (2021:96).

*“Then I realised this is a pearl that we have here, this presence” Petro Benadé*

**Petro Benadé**, PhD candidate in the Presence research programme, shares valuable insights into what presence means in practice: “So these presence practices are things like the relationship with a patient, your communication, to be caring, to listen to your patient, what do your patients need, their preferences, who are they, what did they do in their life, do they have family, do they have children? So that relationship together with caring, loving and the knowledge and skills of nursing, that is what caring is all about, that your patient must really feel well cared for, he must feel safe emotionally and physically in your presence.” Beurskens, Van der Linde and Baart (2019:45) proclaim that one of the basic assumptions of presence is that you can only know what the other needs if you immerse yourself in their situation and that you always have to look at the other in their world, life course and network before you can understand what a problem really means to them.

*“Let our light shine, when you go into a place, let people have the feeling that: ‘Now, there is life. I am happy to see this person’, because of your presence” Babalwa Tau*

**Babalwa Tau**, lecturer at the School of Nursing Science, North-West University, compares caring presence with *Ubuntu*: “He (Baart, 2016) was talking about *Ubuntu* that time and you know *Ubuntu* is like something that, with us, it's something that we

are, we grow up with, we are socialized into as growing from our culture as Xhosa's. So that in a way, I think it has shown me that in my whole journey from being a student up until now I've been practising presence, but not knowing that I've been practising presence."

*"And I think that is what presence really mean, it lifts that bar so that it is easier for the patient to get to full healing without using a lot of energy."*

*Welma Lubbe*

**Prof Welma Lubbe**, professor in midwifery at the School of Nursing Science, North-West University, talks about presence from the perspective of a patient: "I think it's a very large part of the healing process (Hosseini *et al.*, 2019:67) because there's a lot of emotional stuff that you don't need to also address and I think that part is important. So I almost want to say it's like that story of the glass being half full, half empty, presence is that part where you have to heal physically and emotionally and you get to a certain point and then you get depleted, so now you have to use a lot of energy to continue that process to get to the full part of the glass, and with presence not being there it's actually taking away a lot of that healing energy. With presence there you don't need to even think about it, it's just there so it keeps your levels there or it even pushes up your levels so that you can really only focus on the physical part of getting healthy and the mental part but it's not extras that you need to give attention to, and I think that is what presence is really, I mean it lifts that bar so that it's easier for the patient to get to full healing without using a lot of energy."

*"I think at the heart of the learning, the perpetuate learning process that presence means, is inquiry, being inquisitive" Elly Beurskens*

**Dr Elly Beurskens**, a staff member at the Presence Foundation, Utrecht, the Netherlands, shares underlying principles of presence that is important to understand when cultivating presence in care providers: "So it's not as easy to do that, it sounds self-evident, of course, we care, of course, we do the best we can and we do, everybody does the best we can, but we can do better if we understand more about who the other person is and what life looks like from their perspective or what suffering or this handicap or this being old and vulnerable means to me. It means different things to different people. So presence talks a lot about the importance of connection and of attunement because giving care is a different task for different people. It depends on who you deal with." This viewpoint is elaborated on in the work by Beurskens, Van der Linde and Baart (2019), among others.

*“They were singing to the patient because they were trying to give the patient hope. You can’t give hope in a tablet” Rudo Ramalisa*

**Rudo Ramalisa**, PhD candidate in the Presence research programme, clarifies that presence starts with self-awareness and shares how mindfulness and attentiveness can add value: “One of the things with presence is being aware of yourself and being able to connect with a person on the on the level of human, or you know like you and I, as I can say I'm Rudo and you're Emmerentia, not I'm a professional nurse and you're my patient. So if we can connect on that level of you're human and I can understand what you're going through even though I've never experienced it but I genuinely understand what you're going through and I want to help you. I've seen how they (nurses) were working with patients because they have literally internalized mindfulness and being attentive because when it comes to the needs of the patient and putting the patient first but also being aware of themselves and how they feel about certain patients allowed them to see if they have a certain dislike towards a patient's condition, whatever, does not affect how they treat that patient. If they have a dislike towards a condition of a patient it does not affect how they interact with that patient at the end of the day when they interact with that patient it's on a human-to-human basis.” These ideas are also found in the work by Klaver and Baart (2011) and others.

*“Slowing down to a pace of care and be present to the one in front of you” Alan Fadling*

**Alan Fadling**, president and founder, Unhurried Living, answers the question about how nurses, who are in a busy profession, can be unhurried: “I see a great connection between the challenge of hurry and the opportunity of presence. I think it's very hard to be present to others in a hurry and so one of the things we have been learning in our own work is how to slow down on the inside in such a way as to be present to the people that we are with. So that's been a very important journey for us of learning and realizing how what happens in us, the ways in which we become hurried in soul gets in the way of simply being present in a caring way to people around us.” These ideas are also reflected in our chapter on ‘A deeper understanding of presence through an exposure’ (Du Plessis & Beurskens, 2021), among others.

## **In conclusion**

Emmerentia: “In conclusion, I would like to share with you a definition that Prof Andries Baart and his colleagues developed. This definition is that presence is a practice where the caregiver relates him- or herself to the other and in this way learn to see what is at stake for the other; from desires to fear and in connection with this, come to understand what can be done in this particular situation and also, importantly, who I can be for the other person. This practice, this way of doing can only be done and only

be achieved through simplicity, subtlety, practical wisdom, craftsmanship and loving fidelity (Bart & Timmerman, 2021:96) This is what I also profess about presence. Thank you so much for being present here today and for sharing your views on presence.”

## **Certificate handover ceremony**

**Prof Jeffrey Mphahlele**, the deputy vice-chancellor of research and innovation at the North-West University presided over the certificate handover ceremony and shared in the conversation of professing presence.

“I would like to really congratulate you for your achievement because this is more than graduating a PhD, you know, to be at this level you know at inauguration level is actually an important milestone in any academic’s career. So congratulations, you deserve it and I’d like to believe that your family who are the backbone of your support must be very proud of you. So that’s one thing, and the second thing is the fact that I know that you are a nurse by profession and so just a few words about what nurses do. You know, but I think I need to underscore this important message because in my own opinion I think a nurse is more than your mom, your dad, your siblings, your aunts and your uncles, combined. That’s how I see the nurses because they are just incredible creatures. They are a rare breed, exceptionally talented people, very resilient and always willing to go the extra mile. They are a source of our inspiration, a source of strength when we are hopeless or desperate about our health and our lives because they know what to tell us to keep us healthy and to keep us in a positive spirit, so your profession is an extremely important profession, Prof Du Plessis.

Obviously, I know that you don’t practice your profession every day now that you are an academic but it is still an important thing to mention that you are trained clinically to practice nursing as a profession and I think this is how you developed the love of presence, the concept presence because as you told me if you are with the patient you should really show the skill of presence. Without the skill of presence, you are emotionally detached from your patient and you will be surprised that the patient can actually feel it. Most people think that patients have got no emotional connection with their carers, but we do. Just like babies having some form of connection with the mothers, very much with the mothers than with the fathers, so I want to say this because I know my babies are very much close to their mom, not because I’m a bad dad but it’s just the way, it is just part of biology. So I just want to say that your profession is exceptional and your profession has actually crafted the career that you followed and your area, professor, just because you have recognized the special talent of your profession.

So, getting back to the concept of presence, I did not hesitate when you asked me to talk about that because I knew I would learn something as a person, I thought what I can actually talk about is just what motivates us as human beings to do what we are doing. For me, what motivates me for doing my work and I can go on *ad infinitum* to describe what motivates me if I have to look at different aspects of my work, but I can

handpick maybe just one area. The area where I feel I have to have a connection with the person as well when I'm doing my work, and this is the area of mentoring and training our fellow academics because if you are an academic at some point in your life you have trained, you have imparted your knowledge to fellow academics. If you look at the area of postgraduate supervision it's just a splendid example of how you connect to people, how you motivate them and how you share your experience and add value to their lives to become something else that they never thought they will be.

I am what I am today because of my supervisor who motivated me from the stage when I entered postgraduate training. The honours, the masters and the doctoral training. I had to follow their advice, had to listen to all kinds of guidance that they provided me and I think for me what really motivates me when I'm supervising and training the next generation of scientists is exactly that, the fact that you have to share your experience with them you have to be connected to them emotionally because if they do have financial baggage, and we all know that this academics it's not just their own baggage, it is also your baggage, as the supervisor or a mentor. So the relationship between a mentor and a mentee is extremely important. It's not just about an academic relationship, it is about sharing their burden, whether it's social issues they experience at their houses and their homes, the finances and everything else, that they are open and willing to tell you and you have to really connect and ensure that empathy. So, for me that is just a perfect example.”

## **Word of thanks and closure**

To our Heavenly Father who shines His light upon us and who created each one of us to make a difference and to be His light on earth: thank you so much.

To Prof Jeffrey Mphahlele and Prof Awie Kotzé and the management of the North-West University, thank you for setting the bar high and thank you for the funding you availed to make this production possible.

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I would like to acknowledge colleagues in practice in nursing and from other disciplines: thank you for your dedication in providing care. You are indeed letting your light shine through your way of being.

To the presence research team: you are the best. You have taken the challenge to research this ‘difficult to comprehend’ concept, presence. It is through you that there will be an impact in practice. Keep up the good work.

To each of the conversationalists in this inaugural address: thank you for your meaningful contributions and your willingness to take part.

To CFD productions, Andrew, Eric and Arno: you are letting your light shine through your kindness, competence, excellent creativity and dedication. Thank you.

To my husband, Maruis, son Gerhard and daughter, Lizette, my parents, Pieter and Bettie Strauss, family and friends: you are creators of deep joy and meaning. You are letting your light shine through your neighbourly love and through being role models to us all. Role models of dedication, creativity and perseverance.

*May the road rise up to meet you,  
may the wind be always at your back,  
may the sun shine warm upon your face  
and the rains fall soft upon your fields,  
and until we meet again,  
may God hold you in the palm of His hand.*

Irish blessing

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