



Doctors Ronisha Sathiram and Suhani Maharaj, urologists of Albert Lutshuli Hospital. Picture: MARILYN BERNARD

# Durban's two female urologists the first on the continent

## CHARMEL BOWMAN

DOCTORS Suhani Maharaj and Ronisha Sathiram have a lot to smile about. Not only are they two of only eight qualified female urologists in South Africa, according to the Health Professions Council, but they are also the first Indian female urologists on the continent.

And contrary to popular belief, they don't just examine male genitals but operate on both male and female patients for an array of illnesses.

Urology is a speciality of diagnosing and treating diseases of the male and female

urinary tracts as well as male reproductive organs.

When the Sunday Tribune visited Maharaj and Sathiram at the urology department of Durban's Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital this week there was a packed waiting room of patients.

They are so busy, Maharaj said, that she missed her graduation in Cape Town this week. "I was in Cape Town a week ago and didn't see the sense in going back for my graduation. "And truthfully I didn't want to miss work," she added. She was quick to set the record straight about what

their jobs entailed.

"About 10 to 15 percent of the job entails problems with male genitals. But we are surgically trained to operate on a number of problems including stones, some paediatrics, cosmetic surgery and some congenital abnormalities," Maharaj said.

She graduated from the Nelson Mandela School of Medicine in 2004 completing her internship at Mahatma Gandhi Hospital and Oshdisweni Hospital in the Ndwenwe district.

After practising in general surgery for nine months, she decided to pursue her passion -

urology. She studied a further four years to specialise in urology at the Colleges of Medicine of South Africa (CMSA), a body that oversees the post-graduate specialisation of doctors. "Working in poorer communities is a very humbling experience."

Sathiram also graduated from the Nelson Mandela School of Medicine in 2003 and did her internship at King Edward Hospital. After almost two years as a surgery registrar, she switched to urology as she had always been fascinated by it.

She also graduated from

CMSA recently.

"There are lots of new procedures that you perform and not just with the male genitals as people tend to think.

"We also use specialised equipment. We are in theatre on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and see patients at a range of government hospitals on the other days."

Dr Tjhart Fourie, the chief specialist of urology in KZN and head of urology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, confirmed that the two doctors were the first Indian female urologists on the continent. He added female uro-

gists comprised less than 2 percent of qualified urologists in the country.

However, he believes this is rapidly changing as more females - as Maharaj and Sathiram who studied under his supervision - have an interest in the speciality.

Asked how they cope with the large workload and long hours, they replied almost in unison, "family".

"I have no plans to leave the country or even state hospitals. I want to stay at state hospitals because this is where patients really need us," Maharaj said.

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