Hasina Subedar stepped down from the position of CEO and Registrar at the South African Nursing Council (SANC) at the end of June 2009. She has made history in many aspects when she was appointed in this position in September 2000 in that she was the first nurse, the first woman and the first person of colour to fill this position since the inception of the SANC in 1944.

Early career and entry into nursing
Her community involvement started at a young age. She started her employment career at the Natal Witness followed by a position at a Community Care Centre where she was responsible for a project that developed self-help skills amongst unemployed persons. Only then did Hasina enter into nurse training to do her diploma in general nursing and midwifery at the Nico Malan Nursing College at Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town.

Hasina then enrolled for and completed a diploma in psychiatric nursing at the Iris Marwick Nursing College. She worked at the Fort Napier and St Augustine Hospitals before joining the Community Mental Health Services: Department of Health: House of Delegates where she was responsible for providing community mental health services to persons with mental health problems. It became abundantly clear from her own training that the training of nurses did not adequately equip a nurse to provide community-based mental health care.

Contribution to nursing education
From 1995 Hasina joined the University of Natal where she facilitated the transformation of curricula of health care professionals. This experience is marked as one of the highlights of her career, she says. Having worked in the community mental healthcare services, Hasina had a good understanding and broader perspective of mental healthcare and the need of communities to have access to these services. The aim was to ensure that training becomes more relevant and community based to empower students to become practitioners that are able to offer a broad spectrum of mental healthcare.

Generally mental healthcare training was based in hospitals and were taught to understand the needs of communities and respond to these needs by adapting their interventions to suit the specific needs of the communities in which they worked.

Contribution to mental health services
After the 1994 changes and restructuring in South Africa, Hasina was prompted to go back to services that she describes as the second highlight of her career. She moved to the Western Cape to take up the position for Deputy Director Mental Health Programme. She developed and implemented a policy and practice framework for integrating mental health into general healthcare in a district health system and was responsible for coordinating primary, secondary and tertiary mental health services. Psycho-social rehabilitation was introduced in the Western Cape in collaboration with SOGG, an organisation from the Netherlands. She developed policy guidelines for the subsidies paid to day-care centres for mentally handicapped persons and facilitated the availability and sharing of resources for mental health services across district, regional and tertiary facilities. A variety of training workshops for general health professionals and mental health care workers were facilitated.

Contribution to the nursing profession
In 2000 Hasina was identified through a ‘head hunting’ process and appointed to take up the position of Registrar of the SA Nursing Council. In this position Hasina has made a significant contribution to the regulation of nursing in South Africa. She facilitated and managed the drafting of the Nursing Act 2005 promulgated in December 2006 and was instrumental in drafting a number of new regulations relating to the new Nursing Act for the Council to approve. This work included reviewing and developing new scopes of practice for four categories of nurses, developing a competency framework and a nursing practice framework. During this period she was appointed to serve on task teams established by the Minister of Health and the Department of Health for the Transformation of Statutory Health Councils; developing a Comprehensive Plan for HIV and AIDS; review of Nursing Education in the Eastern Cape; the mid-level worker; and the Nursing Strategy. She also participated in the development of nursing internationally and in Africa.

But most importantly from the general nursing population’s view, Hasina came out of the ‘ivory tower’ to share her knowledge and to network and liaise with the nurses at grass roots level at various conferences, workshops and consultative meetings. The most positive response to the visibility of the Registrar of the Council was certainly the input received from the profession after the country-

Forum: Hasina Subedar – a nurse leader of distinction

Netouise Geyer, FPNL
wide workshops hosted by the Nursing Council on the Charter for Nursing Practice. But obviously not all audiences were easy going and there certainly is a lesson for us to learn from Hasina’s resilience and patience with sometimes very difficult audiences to always look past the difficulties or challenges to focus on the professional issue at hand.

During 2007 Hasina provided support to Atlantic Philanthropies advising them on their nursing programme and assisted grantees to meet grant requirements. This programme has since been rolled out and is now running successfully in various parts of the country.

Lifelong learning
Hasina provides us with a wonderful example of lifelong learning. After completing her basic training she continued her studies at the University of Natal where she obtained an advanced diploma in education, B Social Science, BA Honours and MCur degrees specialising in mental healthcare.

More recently in 2008 she has completed the Edward Masons Certificate in Public Policy and Management and a Masters in Public Administration, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University after being awarded the Nelson Mandela Harvard fellowship (2007/8) and the Edward Mason Fellowship (2007/8) at the Kennedy School of Government (Harvard University). Although this was a very challenging experience, it has also been a very enlightening and enriching one allowing her the opportunity to consolidate her management experience and knowledge. “Having had the opportunity to do this programme, I have come to realise that we cannot manage successfully unless we have a broad knowledge of various components influencing management such as economics, development aid, politics, strategic management,” she says. During her studies she gained valuable insights about health systems and health policies of various countries. South Africans can sometimes be quite naive in their quest to achieve the best health policies for the country not realising that it is the powerful that dictate what happens. We have to be mindful of what can happen and remain vigilant of external forces that have vested interests when we have the opportunity to influence policies, she says. The programme had a strong contingent from Africa and provided a superb networking opportunity with other people from developing countries to understand and share experiences on how they tackle the same problems.

Message to the nursing profession
Hasina’s message to the nursing profession is that we as nurses must use the challenges, opportunities, trials and tribulations we are often faced with to empower and develop ourselves. “As I embarked each day, week, month and year during my term as Registrar I was faced with new challenges, opportunities, trials and tribulations and with each day I developed the strength to embrace these and today I emerge empowered from this experience. I am honoured to have served the nursing profession as the Registrar of the South African Nursing Council and I thank the nursing profession for providing me with this invaluable opportunity,” she says.

Best wishes
Hasina, the Forum for Professional Nurse Leaders salute you for your significant contribution to the nursing profession and wish you well with your future endeavours. You have indeed left a rich legacy of strong leadership and a commitment to change to facilitate progress for the nursing profession. Your boots will be difficult to fill.