



# BHEKISISA

CENTRE FOR HEALTH JOURNALISM



*The Bhekisisa team*

Mail & Guardian

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Bhekisisa means “to scrutinise” or “look closely”. Zulu patients who want to be thoroughly examined by a physician will often ask the doctor to *bhekisisa* them. The M&G health journalism centre will *bhekisisa* health issues and you, as our media consumers, will *bhekisisa* us to make sure we do our job well.

## WHAT HAVE WE DONE SO FAR?

- Each week we publish a three-page health section in the M&G, filled with stories we have researched and written. We also write health stories for the main part of the newspaper.
- In April 2013, we hosted a critical thinking forum on SA’s [National Health Insurance](#) scheme. We will host a second NHI discussion forum in November.
- In June 2013 we organised a media briefing at the [SA Aids conference in Durban](#) on the government’s plans for a newly approved medical male circumcision device, [PrePex](#). In December, we will host a media training event on medical male circumcision in Cape Town at the International Conference on Aids in Africa in partnership with the Community Media Trust.
- Bhekisisa staff members have delivered guest lectures at the University of the Witwatersrand’s journalism department, and trained journalists from Avusa and the International Women’s Media Foundation’s HIV fellows in South Africa.
- We’ve hosted [Bhekisisa media fellow](#) Sydney Masinga from African Eye News Service for three months. During this time we mentored and helped him to nurture his health journalism skills. In September, our second fellow, Lenadine Koza, a science writer from the Medical Research Council, will start with us.
- Between February and August 2013 Bhekisisa has produced 120 [health articles](#), 80 of which were on our health pages, 19 appeared in the main body of the paper and 21 were featured exclusively on the M&G website.

## WHAT DO OTHERS SAY ABOUT US?



- Bhekisisa was quoted in health minister Aaron Motsoaledi’s [budget vote speech](#) in May 2013.

“A report compiled by the Mail & Guardian’s newly established Bhekisisa health reporting centre and published on Friday last week demonstrates one of the examples. It shows how four years ago, the department of health introduced two very new vaccines. . . to reduce the risk of children contracting pneumonia. . . and . . . diarrhoea in children.”

• Wits HIV Media Project have had this to say about Bhekisisa's impact in one of their weekly evaluations on HIV reporting in SA:

“Crucially, the M&G's coverage also highlights that the HIV preventative power of circumcision is only based on medical male circumcisions (MMC) in which the entire foreskin has been removed. Traditional male circumcision (TMC) does not always result in complete removal of the foreskin and the effect of partial circumcision on HIV is currently unknown. This important information is rarely highlighted in coverage on circumcision, whether it be MMC or TMC focused. However, when considering disparities in the quality of coverage which looks at circumcision, it is important to bear in mind that the Mail & Guardian, unlike less specialised dailies, has the resources, for example their Bhekisisa centre specifically for health journalism, to engage with issues in a comprehensive manner. Currently, this kind of reporting is very rare, as the demise of specialised beats is forcing many journalists to become generalist reporters.”

## WHAT IMPACT HAVE WE HAD SO FAR?

- After publishing a story on [fistula in Uganda](#) in August 2013, a South African woman got in touch with our reporter, who helped her to find access to a surgeon who could assist her domestic worker with the correct treatment.
- Following an article we published in August 2013 on botched circumcisions, The Pondoland King's Council initiated discussions on the possible integration of [medical circumcision with traditional initiation ceremonies](#), i.e. giving initiates the option of doctors and healthcare workers, instead of traditional circumcisers and nurses, to remove the foreskin from their penises at initiation schools. As a result of the article, a major HIV organisation offered free medical doctors for this purpose.

## HAS OUR WORK BEEN RECOGNISED?

In 2013, Bhekisisa reporters won the following awards:

- Discovery Health Journalist of the Year overall award
- Features and health consumer category of the Discovery journalism awards
- Finalist in the Lovelife Young Health Journalist of the Year in the Discovery journalism awards
- South African National Press Club's Print Feature Journalist of the Year
- Brandhouse Responsible Drinking Media Awards Newspaper Journalist of the Year
- International Women's Media Foundation HIV investigative reporting fellowship



*Patients waiting in line at Chris Hani Baragwanath: Oupa Nkosi*

**Director:** Mia Malan

**Reporters:** Amy Green & Ina Skosana

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