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Media Release

SANBS Re-envisions Ethics: Beyond the Vein, Into the Heart

Johannesburg, 15 October 2025 - Each year, Global Ethics Day invites individuals and institutions worldwide to pause and ask one vital question: Are we living and leading ethically?

That question isn't abstract for the South African National Blood Service (SANBS) – it's lived every day. Every unit of blood, every donor interaction, and every decision made in the organisation is guided by a deep moral compass that places human life at the centre.

The 2025 Global Ethics Day theme, "Ethics Re-envisioned," resonates deeply with SANBS. Ethics can no longer be viewed as static rules in a world reshaped by technology, pandemics, inequality, and misinformation. It's a living practice requiring honesty, transparency, and accountability.

For SANBS, re-envisioning ethics means:

- Ensuring equitable access to safe blood, regardless of geography, race, or social standing.
- Treating every donor and patient with dignity and respect.
- Upholding transparency and accountability in every process – from when blood is donated to when it reaches a patient in need.
- Leading with compassion, because every ethical decision ultimately serves one purpose: saving lives.

It's a question SANBS often faces, and one that reveals the ethical complexity of public service in today's climate. Many South Africans, facing economic hardship, ask: "If donors give blood for free, why does SANBS charge hospitals?"

The answer lies in understanding the journey of blood. Once donated, blood undergoes a rigorous and costly process to ensure it is safe and viable, including testing for infectious diseases, proper storage, temperature control, and secure transportation across thousands of kilometres. So yes, it's not free but not for sale.

As a not-for-profit organisation, SANBS doesn't sell blood. It recovers only the cost of this life-saving process. Every rand goes back into maintaining a system that allows hospitals, both public and private, to have access to safe, reliable blood. That's not profit; that's public health stewardship.

At SANBS, ethics isn't confined to boardroom discussions or annual campaigns. It lives in small, daily actions:

- A nurse comforting a nervous first-time donor.
- A driver ensures delivery timelines are met so a transfusion can happen in time.
- A lab technician double-checks results because accuracy is key to a healthy outcome.

These choices, often unseen, represent the real ethical backbone of SANBS.

As CEO, Ravi Reddy reminds us, "Ethics isn't about what you say, it's about the choices you make when no one is watching. Every decision at SANBS connects back to someone's life, making the ethical path the only one."

Trust is the currency of ethics. SANBS continually works to earn that trust by being open about its processes and ensuring donors and communities are part of the conversation. The organisation's THREAD values - Transparency, Honesty, Respect, Equity, Accountability, and Diversity - aren't mere slogans; they are the foundation of how SANBS operates.

"As communicators, our responsibility is to bridge understanding to ensure every South African knows that ethics isn't an abstract concept at SANBS; it's a daily practice. When people see the heart behind the process, they trust not just the system, but the humanity within it," says Sifiso Khoza, Communications Manager at SANBS.

SANBS has also launched a new educational platform, the "Ok, Let's Talk: #BloodMatters" podcast, to deepen public understanding and rebuild trust where doubt exists. The first episode, released on 15 October, fittingly titled "Are We Ethical?", unpacks the myths, questions, and debates surrounding ethics in blood donation.

Hosted by Lulama Qabaka with guest Ravi Reddy, the episode takes listeners behind the scenes, discussing everything from leadership ethics to the moral questions around unpaid donors. It's a candid, humorous, and insightful conversation that invites South Africans to think critically about ethics, fairness, and giving.

In celebrating Global Ethics Day 2025, SANBS reaffirms its unwavering commitment to ethical excellence and compassionate service. The organisation's vision extends beyond blood; it's about building a society where integrity, empathy, and shared humanity guide our actions.

As Reddy puts it, "Blood donation is one of the purest acts of ethics, giving something of yourself for someone you'll never meet. That's humanity at its best."

This year, as we reflect on ethics globally and locally, SANBS reminds every South African that ethics isn't about perfection – it's about intention. It's about showing up, doing good, and doing it honestly.

So, roll up your sleeves this Global Ethics Day, not just to donate blood, but to live ethically, lead ethically, and give ethically.

END

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ABOUT SANBS

The South African National Blood Service (SANBS) is an independent non-profit organisation and a leader in blood transfusion. SANBS operates in eight out of nine provinces in South Africa (except for the Western Cape, which the Western Cape Blood Service services) and provides crucial support to countries in the SADC region.

The organisation prides itself on being the lifeblood of South Africa's healthcare system, providing over one million world-class blood products. This pedigree comes from world-class testing and collection protocols, ensuring that the transfused blood is always of the highest quality. SANBS operates a vast network of donor centres, including over 70 fixed centres and over 100 mobile collection sites daily.

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