

Suzanne Venter of *Rapport* wins Taco Kuiper Award for Life Esidimeni story

Suzanne Venter's expose in *Rapport* of how more than 94 mentally ill patients died after being moved to unregistered facilities has won the 12th Taco Kuiper Award for Investigative Journalism.

The award and R200,000 went to Venter for her Life Esidimeni story, which began with a tip-off on Facebook and which has become the subject of an official inquiry by the Health Ombudsman.

At the Taco Kuiper awards ceremony, held at the Wits Club in Johannesburg on 24 March 2017, the acting convenor of judges for 2017, Justice Malala described the winning entry: "When Suzanne Venter first confronted former Gauteng Health MEC Qedani Mahlangu with this story, she was told that 'all this is just hearsay' and was kicked out of the MEC's office. Venter stayed with the story for months, brought us the human side of it, while exposing the corruption and insensitivity of our political leaders, as they refused to accept what was happening."

The runner-up, who takes home R100,000, was a *Sunday Times* story by Thanduxolo Jika, Sabelo Skiti and Qaanitah Hunter about state capture. Their story delved into the murky offering of ministerial positions to Mcebisi Jonas and others, allegedly by the Gupta family. The investigation goes on to draw links between several ministers' visits to Dubai, Saxonwold and other places.



Suzanne Venter

According to Malala, "This was a solid, deep investigation into an ongoing and pivotal South African story."

Malala lauded all entries and concluded, "Many of the stories had incredible results. Commissions of inquiry were instituted, political heads rolled and fraudulent careers were stopped in their tracks. This is what Taco Kuiper aimed for in his endowment of the investigative journalism award."

Ben Bradlee Jnr delivered the keynote address at the Taco Kuiper Awards. He was assistant managing editor for investigations during the Boston Globe's exposé of the Catholic Church's sexual abuse scandal in 2001/2. This painstaking two-year investigation came to a head in 2003, when the team won the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service Journalism. This triumph of careful, meticulous and brave investigative reporting was dramatised in the film *Spotlight*.

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