

TO: ALL MEDIA

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THE KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH COMMEMORATES WORLD TB DAY IN MURCHISON, IN THE SOUTH COAST OF THE PROVINCE

The MEC for Health will today, 24 March 2009, lead the commemoration of the World TB Day in the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. As part of the commemoration, she will officially open a decentralised Multi-Drug Resistant (MDR)-TB Unit (the Murchison Good Hope Centre) where patients from the south coast will now be managed and treated for MDR-TB.

The unit has cost the Department of Health around R4 million to build and will cost R11 million per annum to run. It is one of four centers for MDR-TB management and treatment in the province with a total bed capacity of 525 beds in the following hospitals; FOSA in eThekweni, M3 in Greytown, Thulasizwe in Zululand, and Doris Goodwin in Pietermaritzburg. Construction and renovations are also underway at Doris Goodwin, M3 Greytown and Manguzi Hospitals increasing the bed capacity by 150 more beds. Since the implementation of the TB Crisis Plan, the department spends no less than R550 million per annum since 2006 and an additional R23 million from the Global Fund. In the previous years, before TB was declared an emergency and a crisis, the department used to spend around R430 million a year, 2004/2005 financial year. (2006/7 - R430 million, 2007/8 - R525 million, 2007/8 - R540 million, 2008/9 - R640 million)

The World TB Day is commemorated to raise awareness about the epidemic of tuberculosis (TB) and to celebrate efforts to eliminate the disease. This annual event on the 24 March marks the day in 1882 when Dr Robert Koch detected the cause of tuberculosis, the TB bacillus. This was a first step towards diagnosing and curing tuberculosis.

The department has devised a protocol for the management of patients from home. This will mean that patients who are smear negative and culture negative, but present with TB clinical symptoms, can be discharged from hospital and receive their daily injections from home. Part of this protocol is to set-up a system to monitor side-effects and also a surveillance system to monitor transmission amongst contacts. KwaZulu-Natal has been approved as a country pilot to evaluate community based management programme as opposed to a hospital based programme. The world is watching this with 'big eyes' and causing a lot of excitement as it allows people with TB to continue with their social responsibilities and remunerative work.

"We are currently registering 114276 patients into the TB treatment programme per annum. The incidence rate in KwaZulu-Natal is around 1100 cases per 100 000 population. Prior to the implementation of the TB Crisis Management Plan, the cure rate was at 44% and has improved to currently at 56%. The defaulter rate was at 15%, and has been reduced to 10%. Overall treatment success rate, which is a combination of cure and treatment completed, was at 64% and is now at 71%. These figures represent the successes in the whole province. It also shows that a collective effort of all stakeholders is the answer to the eradication of TB in KwaZulu-Natal. Working together we can do more, better!" said the MEC for Health (Ms Neliswa Peggy Nkonyeni) during her speech.

The event is being held at Murchison Hospital, in Ugu District (KwaZulu-Natal).

For interviews, you are requested to call Chris Maxon at 0832850567 or Desmond Motha at 083 295 3901.

Ends

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