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The MEC For Health Opens A Centre (Ithembalabantu clinic) To Improve Anti-retroviral Treatment Uptake

Today, 31 March 2009, the MEC for Health in KwaZulu-Natal (Ms Neliswa Peggy Nkonyeni) has opened a HIV & AIDS centre in Umlazi to cater for the provision of anti-retroviral treatment to those in need of treatment.

The centre is a result of a partnership between the Department of Health and the AIDS Health Care Foundation (AHF). "The President of the International AIDS Conference, Mr. Michael Weinstein, during the 2000 XIII International AIDS Conference met AIDS activists and toured the townships. After seeing the compassion and commitment of those involved in the fight against HIV and AIDS made a vow to develop partnerships and planned to open a clinic in eThekweni," said Mr. Terri Ford; Senior Director Global Policy, AHF. Mr. Ford introduced a celebrity who flew from Los Angeles (USA) to witness the opening of the clinic, Ms Sheryl Lee Ralph. Ms Ralph exploded into song, singing; "I am a woman, I am a victim" before she could address those in attendance.

The clinic has become a seed of hope which will grow into a thriving tree. The successes of Ithembalabantu Clinic are beginning to show the world that treating requires partnerships and multi-pronged strategies of prevention, care, support and treatment. The clinic started caring for 200 patients in its first year (2002) and has steadily grown into a facility that cares for over 7000 patients to date.

"The impact of iThembalabantu Clinic is beginning to be felt in the nearby Prince Mshiyeni Memorial Hospital where the number of patients awaiting initiation into the anti-retroviral treatment programme has drastically decreased. This relieves Prince Mshiyeni Hospital to concentrate on other important programmes like the management of chronic diseases and traumas. We are also seeing an increase in Voluntary Testing and Counseling (VCT) uptake in the area as part of the National Strategic Plan (NSP). The centre, through its treatment programme, is decreasing morbidity (illness) and mortality (deaths) of those with AIDS defining illnesses," said Ms Neliswa Peggy Nkonyeni during her speech.

The MEC added that; "The condom campaign initiated by AHF together with our District office has increased condom uptake and this will improve our chances of meeting the NSP target of decreasing the incidence of HIV by 50%."

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