

Media statement : students lit a candle to remember how Aids has touched their lives

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“Government and parents have protected you for the first 20 years of your lives from getting HIV; through the various programmes and proper upbringing,” said MEC Dhlomo to Durban University of Technology students on Wednesday at the University organized Candlelight Memorial commemoration to remember those who have died from AIDS. “Now, at tertiary institutions, it is up to you to make correct and responsible decisions about your life.”

On Sunday 15 May 2011; people worldwide will light a candle on occasion of the 28th International AIDS Candlelight Memorial. Candlelight memorial is used to: remember those who have lost their lives to AIDS; to support those living with HIV and affected by its impact, and to encourage calls to action for greater awareness. This year’s Candlelight Memorial will be commemorated under the theme “Touching Lives” to highlight how HIV has touched the lives of many people. “Touching Lives” also refers to how an improved HIV response with more treatment access, better prevention methods and respect for dignity touches the lives of people living with and affected by HIV.

The MEC for Health in KwaZulu-Natal, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, told students that almost 10 percent of female students who finish secondary education have been infected with HIV whereas about 95% of their male peers are negative.

“This we know because as we conduct male medical circumcisions one of the screening tests that we request is an HIV test,” said MEC Dhlomo. “We now know for sure that in the ages of 15 – 19 years boys are largely HIV negative. On the other hand; the province had around 190016 deliveries in 2010 and 16910 (9%) of these were by girls below the age of 18 years.”

He then said that these girls do not get the virus from the skies above and society knows that they get it from older men who entice them with cell phones and other material things.

The challenge, said the MEC, is three-fold. The first challenge is to prevent older men from engaging in sexual relations with younger girls. Secondly; it to ensure that pregnant women, who are HIV positive attend clinics early so that they are put in the prevention of mother to child transmission programme thus ensuring that they deliver HIV free babies. Thirdly; he said it is for the young girls and boys to ensure that the efforts of their parents and government to keep them from getting the virus are not washed out. Government does not anticipate that in 20 years there will be people who are orphaned because their parents have died from AIDS. “Treatment is available to prolong the lives of parents and ensure that they remain productive in the family and society. So, why would there be an orphan when currently our ARV programme has 425 936 active patients and continues to grow daily?”

“This you can do,” continued MEC Dhlomo. “By ensuring that when you decide to enter into a relation at tertiary level you ask your partner to go with you and get tested for HIV.”

‘If it is to be, it is by me’ the MEC told students to keep this motto in mind at all times. The motto was part of Zinhle Maphumulo’s motivational talk to students before the MEC’s address.

ENDS

For pictures please contact Morgan Kisten (DUT) at 0726223570.

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