

Skilled nurse deprivation drives a midwife to work harder and better for rural poor

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"I was concerned to see that most of the nurses who worked in the clinics around Nongoma were from other areas and, in many instances, would leave the area without nurses to help the mostly rural poor communities," said Mrs. Vezumusa Zungu (43) who was one of the ten recipients of the Midwives AIDS Alliance (MAA) Better Practice awards that were present last night at the Durban's Southern Sun (Elangeni) Hotel.

"I knew from that moment that I wanted to be a nurse to help my community and have remained in this community since I qualified as a nurse." KwaZulu-Natal had two recipients for these awards including Mrs. Zungu from Queen Nolonolo Clinic in Nongoma and Mrs. Ayanda Ngema who works at Nseleni Clinic near Richards Bay.

The MAA was formed in 2008 to add the voice of midwives to the HIV debate and advocacy work in South Africa. The MAA introduced Better Practice Awards in 2009 as a way of recognizing midwives who have gone an "Extra Mile" to improve service delivery in Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV (PMTCT). For this year's (2011) awards, the Alliance focused on the Primary Health Care (PHC) or Clinic midwives who have been innovative and creative in prevention and management of HIV in maternal and child health services of each of the nine provinces of South Africa. This was aimed at motivating the midwives to become more committed to integration of PMTCT policies into maternal and child care practices thus contributing to the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDG) 4, 5 & 6.

The MEC for Health in KwaZulu-Natal Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo addressed the gathering and said; "I am very proud of all the midwives of this country, and Province in particular, for the great work that you are doing to improve the provision of care to pregnant women and their newborns. As a country we aim to increase life expectancy of all people to above 70 years as it happens in countries such as China and you, midwives, are at the beginning of the road to realising that goal."

The awards were presented to midwives on the sidelines of the concluding International Confederation of Midwives Congress held at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli Convention Centre where midwives from South Africa were heralded for the drastic reduction of mother to child transmission of HIV to as low as 3,5% nationally (2,3% in KwaZulu-Natal) from above 20% five years ago. The midwives have committed themselves to eliminating the transmission of HIV to unborn children by 2015 – to which they all chant "PMTCT wherever you are".

The MEC advised the midwives that there is a hospital (Dundee Hospital) in KwaZulu-Natal where there has not been a maternal death in the past two years. He said he has asked the Advanced Midwife in that hospital to explain to him how they were able to achieve such an outcome. He further challenged the two recipients from KwaZulu-Natal to advise him on what is it that they are doing differently in their facilities to deserve the prestigious awards; and this will allow the MEC to share such experiences with other midwives in facilities that are performing poorly. MEC Dhlomo challenged midwives to write about their work experiences so that their best practices can be shared with their colleagues in other parts of the country and for the realisation of a long and healthy life for all South Africans.

He also said that seeing the generation of recipients being young brings him hope but emphasised the need for those who have been in the field longer to mentor the younger generation. He concluded by saying; "If we are to realise our goal of a better healthcare system in this country, it will start with midwives who safeguard each woman and child so they may live to their full potential. The results will reverberate far beyond the lives of those directly affected, fostering a better health for all."

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