

TO: ALL MEDIA
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Emergency ambulance service is a National duty which must be conducted with discipline, commitment and honour - MEC Dhlomo

Empangeni, the MEC for Health in KwaZulu-Natal Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has called on the Emergency Medical Service (EMS) personnel to serve the community with discipline, commitment and honour. MEC Dhlomo was speaking during his visit to the Stanger and Empangeni parades of Emergency Medical Service personnel as part of the 'Operation Bring Back Order' which he announced when he distributed 292 brand new ambulances into the current fleet in June.

"The people of KwaZulu-Natal are unhappy with the service that we are giving them. At the centre of their complaints is lack of discipline, shown by poor attitudes, poor response times and absolute disregard for human life," said MEC Dhlomo at Empangeni today. "We cannot allow a situation where some of you damage vehicles at the current rate. In one District a brand new vehicle that we had given them a few weeks ago at the cost of R800 000 has already been written off. In Pietermaritzburg, and elsewhere, people have to wait for no less than five hours for an ambulance. This is unacceptable."

MEC Dhlomo is on a road show visiting all the Districts speaking to EMS personnel with a view of bringing back discipline, commitment to service and dedication. This follows public complaints to the MEC, and in the media, about long response times, poor staff attitudes, and fleet conditions despite these being replaced on a regular basis.

He has already visited two districts, namely Sisonke (Ixopo) and Ugu (Port Shepstone), and today he was visiting iLembe (Stanger) and uThungulu (Empangeni). With these visits the MEC aims to reach all of the approximately 3000 personnel with a clarion call to all 'to bring back order in and confidence to the ambulance service'. During these visits the MEC invited leaders of various community sectors to play a 'meaningful and supportive role in the provision of emergency medical services which is a constitutionally guaranteed right'.

"As a department we have promised 'a long and healthy life to all South Africans'. The Minister of Health Dr Aaron Motsoaledi has signed a service delivery agreement with the President wherein he promises the President (in my case with the Premier) that he shall achieve this goal. For us to achieve this we must provide a service that satisfies the emergency healthcare needs of the community, has improved accountability, and promote more effective and efficient operational management."

MEC Dhlomo continued and warned that unless this is achieved, the health outcomes of the province and country will not improve. He challenged community leaders to be vigilant stewards of their communities. "Where you see EMS personnel abusing vehicles, you must not hesitate to call our TOLL FREE NUMBER (0800 005300) and report such persons. When they are rude, they are reflecting the families and communities they come from and as such it is you, community leaders, who must help us in addressing uncouth elements within us."

The EMS personnel stood in front of the Mayors and Amakhosi to once more recite an oath to service that they took when they were admitted into the profession.

The MEC, and the department, has admitted that the traditional and unacceptable way of operating is unacceptable to the community and the improvement of healthcare outcomes. The MEC told the EMS personnel and community leaders that he would monitor the ambulance service and is expecting to hear news of improvement. He emphasised the importance of EMS personnel understanding the need to being accountable for their activities.

Concluding the visit, MEC Dhlomo said; "You provide a service that is priceless and falls in the category of national duty. The list of benefits of the care you provide can extend beyond the patient to

families and other carers. To understand this it would be useful to begin to look at yourselves as part of the continuum of care and view yourselves in the context of the outcomes of the service delivery system. Adoption of this approach to the measurement of performance in ambulance services would be consistent with a broader interest in measuring performance across the healthcare system.”

ENDS

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