

MEDIA ALERT

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TO : ALL MEDIA

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KZN Health MEC welcomes the return of the Cuba-based medical doctors for the holidays

KWAZULU-NATAL Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, has welcomed the 307 Cuba-based medical students who have come home for the July and August school holidays.

The medical students will be deployed to health care institutions throughout the Department's 11 health districts in order for them to get an opportunity to observe patient care in KwaZulu-Natal clinics, Community Health Centres and hospitals.

Dr Dhlomo said: "Cuba has excellent health outcomes as a result of their primary Health care approach. This has allowed them to eliminate some diseases like malaria, TB and others. Because of strong health education and health promotion, people in Cuba only develop hypertension and other non-communicable diseases quite late in life. If our students get to visit the clinics and hospitals, they will observe the disease profile in South Africa and that will assist them a lot when they complete their training and return to South Africa to begin serving as medical doctors."

Dr Dhlomo also expressed his thanks to Cuba for its partnership with South Africa, saying that it continues to have a massively significant impact on alleviating the shortage of doctors in the country.

He said South Africa had come from a shameful history that fostered segregation in Medical Education. The apartheid regime promulgated the Extension of University Education Act 45 of 1959, which limited the universities that Black South Africans could enter. This law was enforced from 1959 to 1984. The only avenue that was created for Africans was MEDUNSA, the Medical University of Southern Africa. As a result, by 1985, 83 percent of all doctors and 94 percent of all specialists were white.

The two Presidents of South Africa and Cuba, former President Nelson Mandela and former President Fidel Castro, agreed to alter this situation by concluding a cooperative agreement in the Health Sector signed in 30 October 1996.

The cooperation enabled South Africa to recruit doctors from Cuba whilst also sending young aspirant doctors from poor communities for medical training in Cuban universities.

South Africa currently has eight medical schools for a population of +/- 50 million people, and produces 1 600 doctors per annum. But Cuba has more capacity, with 22 medical schools for a population of +/- 11 million. This implies that Cuba trains more students with a better yield in any given time frame.

Dr Dhlomo said: "We are now happy to announce that for KwaZulu Natal there are 907 students that have been sent to Cuba since the inception of the Programme. Of these, 789 are still attending, and 88 completed the training Programme. But unfortunately 4 of them have passed on. We also have 7 students returning who will be graduating on 10 July 2015 in Cape Town."

The South African students who are back home for the holidays will return to Cuba in a staggered process, with the last group leaving on 06 September 2015.

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