

MEDIA RELEASE
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KZN Health MEC gives pearls of wisdom to Cuba-bound medical students

KWAZULU-Natal Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, has urged the 335 medical students who are returning to Cuba to party less, and prioritise their education so that they can come back home and make a tangible difference in their own communities as doctors.

The MEC was speaking at Durban's Addington Hospital today, ahead of the students' departure to Cuba from Saturday onwards.

Dr Dhlomo said that out of the 353 students who have been back in South Africa since 04 June 2015, 18 had returned for good. Those had now begun the final leg of their studies at various South African universities before graduating as doctors.

Through the ground-breaking Mandela/Castro Medical Training Programme, KwaZulu-Natal currently has 789 students in training in Cuba and 85 qualified doctors fully employed by the Department.

At the end of August 2015, the Department will enroll 13 more students in the programme, including 3 students whose parents have made an appeal to pay 100% towards their fees. The long-term investment in the training of medical officers, inclusive of internally-trained doctors, will ensure full coverage of the province by doctors.

Urging the students to always be on their best behaviour and steer clear of alcohol and avoid unplanned pregnancies, Dr Dhlomo said: "For as long as you are in Cuba, you are our ambassadors. What ever you do while you are there, becomes a reflection on South Africa. Therefore, we expect you to behave well. I want to remind you that that seat that you occupy, could have been occupied by someone else. But now that you have been given the opportunity, use it wisely."

This Cuba-bound group have spent the past two months deployed at health care institutions throughout the Department's 11 health districts. This afforded them an opportunity to observe patient care in KwaZulu-Natal clinics, Community Health Centres and hospitals, as the country's disease profile is different from that of Cuba.

Dr Dhlomo says that Cuba has excellent health outcomes as a result of their primary Health care approach, which 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.

"By visiting the clinics and hospitals, the South African students got to observe the disease profile in South Africa. This will assist them greatly when they complete their training and return to South Africa to begin serving as medical doctors."

Dr Dhlomo said he would pray for the 26 students who had not passed their exams, and were in the process of writing their supplementary exams.

"Generally, students are performing well, except for those who could not be promoted to the next level. There are 26 students who failed their first medical year according to the report from the Embassy. We urge those students to pull up their socks and work hard. We will pray for them."

ENDS

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