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KZN Department of Health to showcase its nurse-driven success story on HIV treatment at the 21st International Aids Conference

Thabisile Mbatha, a nursing sister from Ceza, in northern KwaZulu-Natal, remembers a difficult period in KwaZulu-Natal when nurses were not equipped to diagnose, treat and manage HIV-positive patients. "Those were tough times. People were suffering, waiting in long queues to get a chance to be seen by a doctor, so they could get their treatment" she recalled.

Ms Mbatha, from Dlebe Clinic, is one of a number of nurses from Zululand and UMkhanyakude Districts who gave their testimonies, on Monday and Tuesday this week, on the massive impact of the Nurse Initiated and Managed Anti-Retroviral Treatment (NIMART) in the treatment and management of HIV in KwaZulu-Natal.

The NIMART course, introduced in 2010, has been developed for nurses working in the field of HIV and TB, as a response to the call to action by the South African Government to strengthen the response to these two epidemics.

The nurses' testimonies will form part a documentary that is being produced by the KZN Department of Health, which will showcase to the world the province's success story in the management and treatment of HIV and TB, and the fight to curb its spread.

On 1 December 2015, World Aids Day, KwaZulu-Natal celebrated the milestone of having surpassed the 1 million mark for people initiated and sustained on Anti-Retroviral Treatment.

The documentary will be screened at the 21st International AIDS Conference, which is set to take place in Durban on 18-22 July 2016.

The nurses who gave their testimonies, at Hlabisa Hospital today and at Empangisweni Tribal Court (Vryheid) yesterday, thanked the government for equipping them with skills to perform tasks that were previously the preserve of doctors.

Sister Mbatha said: "I would like to thank government for empowering nurses with the knowledge and skills to initiate and treat HIV positive patients through NIMART.

"Thank you to the Department of Health for trusting us, for giving us this opportunity, for giving us the knowledge and skills to do this programme.

"HIV used to be a life-threatening condition. Back then, if you spoke about it, everyone got scared. But through NIMART, we are not scared of it. People are now enjoying life.

"Thanks to NIMART, there's viral suppression is today; people's CD4 count is rising. People are enjoying their lives. They're bringing their partners, their friends, everybody. Now the enrolment of our clients is improving day by day. That's why we have so many people initiated. I'd like to give credit to the government for giving us knowledge and skills. I call myself a mini-doctor."

KwaZulu-Natal Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, thanked all 1722 NIMART-trained nurses from throughout the Province for their immense contribution in efforts to fight HIV and AIDS. He said that, had it not been for nurses being on NIMART, the Province would not have managed to initiate more than 1 million people on Anti-Retroviral Treatment.

"I would like to single out our nurses who are enrolled and participating on NIMART. We acknowledge that we could not be where we are, having initiated more than 1 million people on ART, if we had not

given our nurses the necessary training; mentoring and competency to give Prescription of ART as well as diagnose, treat and manage patients with HIV/AIDS.

“We are thankful for the vision that helped us recognise that the HIV problem was and remains bigger than what doctors would have achieved. There is no way we could have been enrolling more than 1 million patients in this Province, if this programme was run by doctors who are very few and far between.

“If at all we plan to save more lives; our hopes rest with the acceleration of this program; so while we came to celebrate, we are here to recharge our nurses to do even more.”

MEC Dhlomo will be proceeding to nine other health districts in the province to listen to nurses’ testimonies and to share experiences and impart advice.



KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, with nurses from Zululand District. Sister Thabisile Mbatha is the second one from the right.

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