

17 August 2015

## **KZN Health MEC announces plans to accelerate the primary health care approach**

KWAZULU-Natal Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, has announced government's bold plans to accelerate the re-engineering of the community-based Primary Health Care (PHC) system in the public health care sector.

The PHC system is based on, among others, disease prevention, promotion of healthy lifestyle and the establishment of a system whereby health care workers work closely with communities, mapping areas, understanding the culture, beliefs and habits of the community, socio-economic status as well as prevalent health conditions.

Dr Dhlomo was speaking at Pholela Community Health Centre (CHC), in Bulwer on Friday, where he delivered a memorial lecture which is dedicated to Drs Sidney and Emily Kark. The Karks, who were from Israel, pioneered the Community Oriented Primary Health Care (COPHC) approach in South Africa by establishing Pholela Health Centre in 1940.

Today, Pholela CHC is acknowledged internationally as the site where the COPHC approach was successfully initiated and put into practice to deal with the health needs of the community.

MEC Dhlomo said it was, however, sad that the COPHC approach was abandoned by South Africa when the Nationalist's Government took over, resulting in an unsustainable legacy of curative and hospital-centric approach to health care.

As a result, many health care workers and health care users in South Africa have been socialized in this approach.

"Here in South Africa, you are respected if you're an orthopaedic doctor who can chop people's legs when they develop complications. But in Cuba, for instance, you're respected because you can teach people how they can prevent diseases. We know the COPH approach works for other countries, we want to see it working in our country."

Dr Dhlomo said that government, working through a provincial task team, would be using Pholela CHC as a pilot site that would eventually demonstrate the effectiveness of the COPHC approach in addressing health systems challenges, and help revive and strengthen the PHC system in the province.

The Department will collaborate the University of KwaZulu-Natal Medical School in its efforts to promote Primary Health Care. This will see the university sending students as part of their training to Pholela CHC.

"This is where we will be monitoring; evaluating; and documenting the process of implementation so as to enable replication and sharing of practices to all our Districts. We are bolstered by the fact that PHC Re-engineering has been prioritized with the aim to accelerate equity in service delivery towards universal access to health care. This is in line with the National Health Insurance vision. With that in mind, we are focusing on keeping people healthy for as long as possible through health promotion and disease prevention. We have invested resources on prevention; treatment; rehabilitation and support efforts at community level by creating and strengthening community-based outreach teams, properly functioning and supervised clinics, Family Health Teams and School Health Teams.

"I would like to express my appreciation to the provincial task team that is working on this revitalization of COPHC. The significance of this lecture today is thus our announcement that as KwaZulu-Natal, we are now reclaiming our rights to the principles of Community Oriented Primary Health Care under the theme: From Jerusalem Back to Pholela," said Dr Dhlomo.

The MEC also expressed his appreciation of South Africa's collaboration with Cuba, who have made great strides in improving the health of its citizens by adhering to the principles of Community Oriented Primary Health Care.

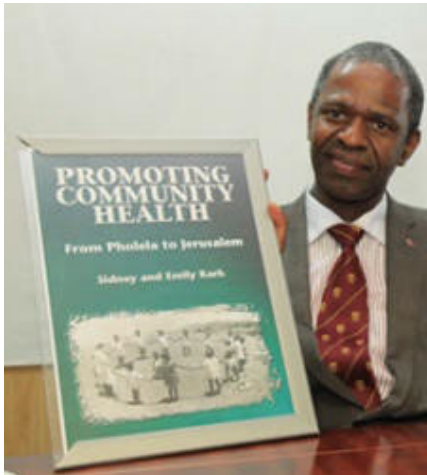
As part of this collaboration, the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health is currently funding 783 medical students studying in Cuba at an approximate cost of R 143.4 million.

"The training of doctors in Cuba is an attractive option for us as the Cuban programme is based on the PHC philosophy. We are already noticing the positive inculcation of this philosophy through the good work being done by the few doctors that have been allocated in areas where they are implementing what they learned."

Earlier in the day, Dr Dhlomo officially opened the Dr Samkelisiwe Theodore Camara Staff Residence Building at Pholela CHC amid a sombre and poignant mood. The building is named after the respected Cuba-trained Dr Camara, who passed away in a road accident on 26 December 2014.

Also in attendance was Dr Camara's husband, Dr Abdoulaye Camara, and his three children.

Dr Dhlomo said the renaming of the building would immortalise Dr Camara's memory in honour of her massive contribution to the community before her demise.



*KZN Health Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo with the cover of a book promoting Primary Health Care, and a photograph of Drs Sidney and Emily Kark.*



*MEC Dhlomo holds a photo of the late Dr Samukelisiwe Theodore Camara inside the staff residence building, while her husband and three children, and Hlobisile MaDlamini Ngcongco - sister to Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma - look on.*



*MEC Dhlomo and Dr Abdoulaye Camara cut the ribbon to mark the official opening of the staff residence building*