

Message by KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo on the occasion of the launch of Anti-illegal Abortions Campaign at UMgungundlovu District

I am very glad that in this campaign we have the support of the Law Enforcement Agencies because what we are concerned about and dealing with is illegal.

It is indeed a matter of great concern that despite South Africa having one of the most progressive abortion laws in the world, South Africa still remains a place where women choose backstreet providers against the widespread available Government sanctioned abortion centres.



It is actually disappointing that 18 years after the promulgation of The Choice of Termination of Pregnancy Act that was introduced in 1996, we still have women being maimed and dying as a result of illegal and unsafe abortions.

What is alarming is that we see these illegal abortion providers on the street corners distributing the illegal abortion pamphlets.

We also see these adverts plastered on nearly all the street walls and lamp posts

The adverts are professing 'safe', 'pain free', 'quick and 'cheap' abortions.

The proliferation of this advertising, and the fact that it is posted in public spaces such as taxi ranks and shopping centres make many women believe they are accessing a legitimate service.

Our concern is borne out by the following statistics:

- Just in the past Financial Year, we had 12 031 patients admitted in various health facilities in the Province due to incomplete abortions and 1 455 septic abortions.
- Also, according to the 2012 Saving Mothers report, in South Africa 186 women died of a septic miscarriage in public health facilities; 23% of which were caused by unsafe or illegal abortions.
- A study by the South African Medical Research Council in 2010 also reported that 49 % of abortions are undergone by young people between the ages of 13 and 19 years and that these take place outside a hospital or clinic

What are circumstances that lead to Abortion?

- Rape or coerced intercourse
- Pregnancy that may not be supported by the partner or family
- Pregnancy which may threaten the woman's health or survival.
- A Foetus that may have abnormalities.
- There may also be personal reasons, socio-economic reasons or cultural reasons for the unwanted pregnancy

What are Obstacles faced by those needing access to safe abortion?

We recognise that despite Legislation legalising abortion, obstacles to accessing safe legal abortions remain:

- The stigma of abortion is as much an obstacle to women accessing the services as it is to the doctors and nurses who provide the services.

- Many healthcare workers that should be providing the services do not always fully the ethos. They often impose their own beliefs on the clients thus limiting the access to appropriate health services.
- Women needing the service feel ostracised, isolated and stigmatised
- We have to work together to change all this. Failure to do so drives young women needing the services to the quack 'doctors' who profess safe, painless and quick abortions.

Dangers of illegal abortions

- Severe bleeding
- Uterine perforation;
- Tearing of the cervix;
- Severe damage to the genitals and abdomen;
- Internal infection of the abdomen and blood poisoning, and
- Increased risk of infertility

I am very excited that the Media is giving coverage to this matter, more especially because of the approach made by one publication The Weekly Gazette, stating:
'I am working on an article where a woman was brought into King Dinuzulu Hospital late last week and died at the hospital.

From my understanding she had taken pills to assist with aborting her foetus. However, she was 8 months pregnant when she took these tablets.... She died at the hospital as a result of excessive bleeding (whereby her uterus came out too).

I know that Sydenham SAPS is investigating the case. I would like to do an article highlighting the effects of taking these tablets, which women are often given by back door doctors and "herbalists". I have heard of many cases of women taking these tablets, often in the wrong dosage and either bleeding out and dying or becoming sterile.'

I sincerely believe that working together with the Media we can expose and hound out these scrupulous people. Working together again, we can succeed on educating our communities, firstly on safe sexual practices as well as on the assistance available for safe terminations.

Away with illegal abortions; away!!

