

MEDIA STATEMENT
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KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, mourns the passing of Prof Rachel Gumbi

KWAZULU-NATAL MEC for Health, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, has mourned the passing on yesterday (25 December 2015) of the trail-blazing academic and former CEO of Prince Mshiyeni Memorial Hospital (PMMH), Dr Rachel Vuyiswa Gumbi.

Prof Gumbi, 73, was famously recalled from retirement in 2010 and tasked with turning around the then-troubled PMMH. This, she did with aplomb, helping restore public confidence in the institution, which she led until her retirement in April 2015.

The transformation at PMMH did not escape the attention of President Jacob Zuma, who, when addressing the Nursing Summit in Sandton, said: 'The attitudes [of health care workers] must change, we must shorten the waiting times or delays in receiving care and health services personnel must ensure that all facilities are clean and tidy at all times.

"Health professionals must prevent the transmission of infections and cross-infections inside hospitals and clinics, and ensure a reliable provision of basic medicines and supplies. These are just some of the few improvements that are expected from all public health facilities. If we implement these provisions, visits to our facilities will be a more tolerable and pleasant experience for our people. It will be as pleasant as what we have been informed has happened at Prince Mshiyeni Hospital in uMlazi, Durban. The hospital has been turned around from being the worst hospital in the country to one which is being praised by patients and the community for good service, efficiency and friendly staff."

Speaking at Prof Gumbi's farewell function in March 2015, Dr Dhlomo paid tribute to her for spearheading the transformation on PMMH.

"We had to find a very strong leader to turn this institution around – provide direction to the staff members and give hope to our people. To this very last day, we do not regret the decision we made in deploying Prof. Rachel Vuyiswa Gumbi here. The hospital has been turned around from being the worst hospital in the country to one which is being praised by patients and the community for good service, efficiency and friendly staff," Dr Dhlomo said at the time.

Reacting to the news of Prof Gumbi's passing yesterday, Dr Dhlomo said: "We are deeply saddened by Prof Gumbi's passing. She was a visionary and true leader, who led a remarkable and most exemplary life that all of us should be inspired to emulate. She leaves behind a proud legacy and we should celebrate her life. Indeed, a colossus has fallen. Everybody in the country, all nurses in the country, will know about her. She gave time for everybody. There are so many things to learn from her. She contributed a lot. She was just a go-getter. I think we should ask God for her soul to rest in peace. She leaves us with extremely important lessons. We send our deepest condolences to her family."

Affectionately known as "Mavee", Prof Gumbi was the fifth Rector at the University of Zululand, and carried the distinction of having been the first woman to hold that position (of Vice-Chancellor) at the institution.

According to a profile posted on the Southern African Regional Universities Association website, prior to this appointment she had been the Chief Director: Human Resource Development, at the National Department of Health between 1996 and 2003. This position also entailed that Prof. Gumbi was to monitor the application of the Equity Act, Human Resource Management Policy Parameters, Education and Training of Health Personnel (multidisciplinary, health profession liaison with Health Councils, professional associations, non-governmental organizations, employee organizations). Between 1998 and 2000, Prof. Gumbi, she served the University of Zululand as a member of its Council.

She held the following diplomas and degrees: Registration as a General and Psychiatric Nurse, Midwife, Nurse Educator, BA (Curationis), majors in Nursing Administration and Community Health, Masters in Community Health (University of Liverpool, UK), research in Maine, USA, Doctor of Literature and Philosophy (UNISA).

Dr Gumbi's illustrious academic career started at the University of Zululand where she worked as a lecturer, and was soon promoted to senior lecturer in the department of Nursing Science. In 1988 she took the position of Professor and Head of the Departments of Health Education and Nursing Science at the University of Transkei.

She first qualified as a teacher, but never taught for even a month. Her first work experience began in 1961 when she trained and worked as a registered nurse, General and Psychiatry and a registered midwife. By 1975 she had worked her way up to become a tutor at King Edward VIII Hospital's College of Nursing.

Prof. Gumbi's achievements include acting as advisor to the World Health Organisation (WHO). She also chaired the Global Advisory Group on Nursing and Midwifery (the six regions of the world). She also became the first Black President of the South African Nursing Council, a position she held from 1995 to 2003.

She also garnered numerous awards over the years, including: South African Medical and Dental Practitioners Award for Leadership; Chicago State University's Award for Leadership in 2003; Black Management Forum (BMF) Award for Leadership and Transformation in 2006; and the Dr Manto Tshabalala Award for Leadership in Health in 2006.

She also served in the boards of the Oliver Tambo Fellowship; the Medical Education for South African Blacks (MESAB); the Medical Research Council, Global Human Resource Forum (WHO).

Prof. Gumbi was well travelled, having traversed Africa, as well as embarked on sojourns to Canada, USA, UK, Europe, India, Asia, where she addressed international audiences.

Her indomitable drive resulted in her establishing numerous rural and urban community empowerment initiatives. She was one of the founding members in the University of Transkei Community Partnerships, resulting in four health centres with resource facilities for education, community empowerment and experiential learning for health personnel.

An avid scholar, her research interests were rooted in the fields of health, personnel education, primary health, interactive education, leadership in public service and education, empowerment of the youth and women.



The late Prof Rachel Gumbi, seen here at her farewell function earlier this year, with the KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, current PMMH CEO Dr Sandile Tshabalala (extreme left), Dr AB Maharaj from PMMH, Dr Mandla Mazizi and Mr Sipiwo Yose.

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