

MEDIA RELEASE
27 October 2015

KZN Department of Health promotes human milk banking to save young lives

KWAZULU-NATAL MEC for Health, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, believes that no baby should be left vulnerable to illness just because their mother cannot breastfeed.

This is why the Department is accelerating the establishment of Human Milk Banks, which have been identified by the World Health Organisation as being crucial in promoting breastfeeding in order to address childhood malnutrition and reduce neonatal morbidity and mortality.

The latest Human Milk Bank was officially opened amid fanfare at the mother-and-child-friendly Lower Umfolozi War Memorial Hospital in Empangeni yesterday. It brings to seven the total number of human milk banks in the Province.

Speaking at the launch yesterday, Dr Dhlomo said the establishment of human milk banks was a strategy to reduce infant mortality, and was in response to the reality that some babies could not access breastmilk from their biological mothers due to a variety of reasons.

“As a Department we firmly believe that an investment in the health of children is an investment in the future of the nation. We have committed to do everything possible to provide all necessary help for the babies in their first 1000 days of life. Optimal nutrition during this period is critical to ensure optimal child health, growth and development.

“Research has proven that Breastmilk is the perfect living food for infants as it meets the baby’s nutritional needs. It further provides immunological and anti-infective factors that protect the baby against infections,” says Dr Dhlomo.

Already, the Department has Milk Banks at Stanger Hospital, Grey’s Hospital, Edendale Hospital, Newcastle Hospital, King Edward VIII Hospital and a Community Human Milk Bank at Ithemba Lethu in eThekweni.

“We also take into cognisance the fact that premature infants are generally deprived of breast milk due to factors such as: shortage of rooming-in facilities for mothers; maternal deaths during birth; mothers being too ill to lactate, and so on.

“Experience has also shown us that without breast milk during their first two weeks of life, premature infants, especially those with a low birth weight of less than 1.8 kg, are left wanting for antibodies. They then become vulnerable to infections and diseases that result in hundreds of them dying,” Dr Dhlomo said.

The MEC said the decision to make Lower Umfolozi War Memorial Hospital the Regional Milk Bank was based on the fact that the institution is in a position to benefit infants from the whole region, which consist of UThungulu; Zululand and UMkhanyakude Districts.

MEC Dhlomo thanked the Department’s partners in Health; PATH International, for facilitating the donation of human milk banking equipment to this hospital. The equipment includes:

- 1 x Human milk bank pasteurising system
- 1 x Portable Universal Power Supply (UPS)
- 1 x Freezer

Lower Umfolozi War Memorial Hospital, being a mother and child hospital, delivers an average of 10 000 babies annually.

It has a ninety-two (92) bedded neonatal unit that is normally utilised at full capacity. The busy neonatal intensive care unit as well as its status as a referral site makes it an ideal unit in which to setup a central milk bank to support the whole region.

“Our objective is to ensure that no infant goes without the life giving and nourishing breast milk just because the biological mother is not there or in a position not to do so.”



KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, and Head of Department, Dr Sifiso Mtshali, with health workers from Lower Umfolozi Memorial War Hospital at the launch of the Human Milk Bank



KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, speaking at the launch

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Issued by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health