

To all Media  
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## **KZN aims to drastically curb the number of under 5 deaths**

KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has called for Midwives and Neonatal Nurses to work together to improve the lives of both neonates and under 5 babies.

The call was made during the Neonatal Nurses Association of Southern Africa National Conference [NNASA] taking place in the All Saints United Church in Pietermaritzburg.

‘I would actually like to see the NNSA working collaboratively with the Midwives’ Association as they both deal with closely related aspects which is the birth giving process as well as the care of new-borns. My take is that these Associations should jointly prepare a paper to be presented to both the Minister and all Health MECs with recommendations on how to further improve the situation of both the mothers and their babies, says Dhlomo.

Here it was explained that KwaZulu-Natal, for instance, is home to just over 10 million people amongst whom roughly 220,000 births occur each year. Most of these births estimated at 192,000 happen at the public health sector institutions.

It was also explained that the country is experiencing a rising number of medicolegal claims involving maternity care and newborn babies.

MEC Dhlomo appreciated the fact that KwaZulu Natal has made some significant strides to reduce the under-5 mortality largely due to the effectiveness of the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV which has dropped from 20% in 2008 to the current level of 1,2 %. He also called for more to be done sighting the South African Medical Journal, which says:



‘Although Africa has made good progress towards reducing under-5 mortality, many children continue to die from preventable causes. Neonatal deaths account for approximately 40% of

all deaths in children >5 years of age in South Africa.’

The Conference categorized the deaths in the following manner:

1. Those linked to healthcare provider-associated avoidable factors:

- (i) Foetal distress monitored but not detected;
- (ii) Foetal distress not monitored and not detected;
- (iii) No intervention for prolonged second stage of labour;
- (iv) Delays in referring the patient and
- (v) Delays in calling for expert assistance.

2. Those that are patient-associated avoidable factors:

- (i) Delays in seeking medical attention during labour;
- (ii) Non-initiation of antenatal care;
- (iii) Booking late in pregnancy;
- (iv) Infrequent visits to antenatal clinics; and

MEC Dhlomo says as the first step, the health workers need to change their mind-set and be open and friendly to those needing contraceptives, explaining that Family Planning assist to:

- Prevent closely spaced and ill-timed pregnancies and births, which contribute to some of the world’s highest infant mortality rates.
- Reduce the risk of unintended pregnancies among women living with HIV, resulting in fewer infected babies and orphans.
- Use of male and female condoms is also instrumental in providing dual protection against unintended pregnancies and against STIs including HIV.
- Reduce adolescent pregnancies as pregnant adolescents are more likely to have preterm or low birth-weight babies and babies born to adolescents are known to have higher rates of neonatal mortality.
- At clinical level MEC Dhlomo says the Department is implementing a four tier health service which envisages the following:
  1. Community services in select PHC clinics and CHCs with at least 500 deliveries each year to have staff and means to render neonatal resuscitation.
  2. District Hospitals to have non-rotating nursing staff and to also be equipped with at least two neonatal high care beds and be able to provide nasal CPAP and Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC).
  3. Intermediate level services to be established in one district hospital in each of the four districts that do not have a regional hospital.
  4. Specialist services in regional and tertiary hospitals with comprehensive services including a neonatal ICU, human milk bank and appropriate follow up services.
  5. At social level; everybody in the community has a role to play especially the Mayors; Councillors; Clergy and Community Care Givers in ensuring that every pregnant woman attends Antenatal care classes as the most important step for mother and child survival, says MEC Dhlomo.

For clarity, please call Desmond Motha@ 083 295 3901

In the photo: MEC Dhlomo addressing the Neonatal Nurses Conference