

MEDIA RELEASE
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To : All Media
Attention : News Editors/ Health Journalists

Hospice week: KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, calls for support for the terminally ill

Kwa-Zulu Natal Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, has urged society to reflect for a moment and remember all the people who are terminally ill in the province.

This comes as South Africa commemorates Hospice Week, which runs from 01 to 08 May. Hospice is a movement represented across the globe that advocates that every person with a life-threatening condition has the right to quality of life and dignity in death.

Hospices are care centers for terminally ill patients, young and old, who suffer from, among others, AIDS, drug resistant tuberculosis, neurological disorders and end-stage organ failure. Since most of the patients in hospices cannot be treated, hospices aim to at least alleviate pain and symptoms of disease as much as possible.

In addition to providing medical care, hospices aim to offer emotional, psychological and spiritual support to patients and their families. Hospice Week, therefore, seeks to recognise, share and celebrate the achievements of hospice and palliative care programmes with their partners.

Hospice Week also highlights the importance of an effective partnership between family members, care-givers, service providers, funders, government departments and other stakeholders as vital to the provision of quality care.

MEC Dhlomo is an ardent campaigner for Palliative Care to be integrated into mainstream healthcare system, as it advocates for the provision of good care to people with advanced illness and to ensure the management of pain and other distressing symptoms.

To mark Hospice Week, Dr Dhlomo has called upon all the people of KwaZulu-Natal to dedicate time towards doing something for those who need help.

“Let us reach out and give a helping hand to those among us who are terminally ill. Volunteering can entail a variety of tasks, from bathing and feeding patients to simply talking to them. We also call on the private sector to identify hospices and pledge their support, where possible,” said Dr Dhlomo.

MEC Dhlomo says that with today’s myriad diseases such as HIV; Tuberculosis and diabetes, an increasing number of people of all age groups end up requiring palliative care services. “We have to be cognisant of the fact that family members of persons who require Palliative Care services, also need support all the time. They have to deal with patients who can no longer take part in the life of the community as the condition being may entail a heavier burden on the family through loss of income, change of roles in the family, stigma and social isolation.”

MEC Dhlomo says that the Department has formed partnerships with NGOs such as the Hospice Palliative Care Association (HPCA) and the Hospice Association of KwaZulu-Natal (HAKZN) in all 11 Health Districts.

Combined, they currently control 21 Hospices, taking care of a total of:

- 46 611 HIV positive patients
- 3 555 Cancer patients
- 12 480 Chronic ill patients, and
- 11 669 children with different health conditions

“As a Department, we have started reviewing and transforming our health services from the hospi-centric approach to the preventive, promotive, curative and rehabilitative approach through the Primary Health Care re-engineering strategy.

This strategy, which is based on Community Oriented Primary Health Care, acknowledges that the service delivery platform starts at household and community level,” says MEC Dhlomo.

To this end, the Department has increased the number of Community Care Givers to 9 600 as means to improve the community’s access to Primary Health Care.

The Department has trained Correctional Services staff, offenders and Traditional Health Practitioners (THPs) in administering Palliative Care.

Clairwood hospital provides sub-acute and chronic care which entails physical and psycho-social rehabilitation for post-operative patients and those with disabilities.

Hillcrest Hospital, which is a specialised hospital in eThekwinini with 175 beds, caters for chronically sick patients who are referred from hospitals throughout the province, who need nursing care. It also offers outpatient service for chronic medication and rehabilitation. Most of the patients currently in house are those with Hypertension, Heart Disease, CVA, Hemiplegia, Paraplegia, Quadriplegia, Head Injury, Dementia, Psychiatric Disease and Congenital Diseases.

Mbongolwane hospital , in **Uthungulu District**, offers similar services.

The Department is also making provision for Paediatric Palliative Care through, among others, construction of the KZN Children’s Hospital.

When fully established, the KZN Children’s Hospital will have a number of in-patient beds set aside for Palliative Care. This hospital will also include a facility for training and programmes for the assessment of caregivers of children with disabilities to enhance home-based care for those in need.

“Palliative care remains every person’s business. Let us lend a hand,” says MEC Dhlomo.

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