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## **More nurses to be trained on nurse-initiated management of antiretroviral treatment (NIMART) programme to meet the expected high demand, following the adoption of new HIV "Test and Treat" guidelines**

THE KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health must urgently train many more nurses in the administering of Anti-Retroviral Treatment as South Africa adopts the World Health Organisation's progressive "Test and Treat" HIV guidelines.

This is according to provincial Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, who spoke in Pietermaritzburg yesterday, during a round of testimonials by nurses who are trained in highly-impactful Nurse-Initiated Management of Anti-Retroviral Treatment (NIMART) programme.

The NIMART programme, introduced in 2010, has been developed for nurses working in the field of HIV and TB, as a response to the call to action by the South African Government to strengthen the response to these two epidemics.

More than 1700 nurses are trained in the programme. Now, KZN is in a race against time to at least double those numbers by September 2016 - in time for the start of the implementation of the new approach to HIV treatment.

In presenting the National Health budget last week, Minister Dr Aaron Motsoaledi announced that from September 2016, South Africa will start providing anti-retroviral treatment to people as soon as they are diagnosed with HIV – instead of having to wait until their CD4 count drops to 500.

MEC Dhlomo hailed the adoption of the new guidelines as a significant milestone in government's quest to improve the lifespan of citizens through the new approach to HIV treatment, he said it also means that the Department needs to urgently train more nurses in NIMART urgently.

"This is indeed a turning point in our lives. But it also means the NIMART Nurses that we have are just not enough. As KwaZulu-Natal, we need to double the numbers we have. Because we have the highest burden of HIV and TB in the country, we have to lead the way by training as many nurses as possible.

"We must train more nurses. And those who are trained must become even more efficient, so they can enroll many more patients."

MEC Dhlomo said that in order to help manage the anticipated demand, the province would also need to increase the number of non-medical sites where medication is collected.

Known as the Central Chronic Medicine Dispensing and Distribution programme (CCMDD), this system is for patients who are stable and do not need to see a doctor or a nurse, but are just coming to collect their monthly supply. Their supplies are delivered to them at pick-up points agreed to by both Government and patients.

To date, 423 facilities in the three National Health Pilot Districts are participating in the programme and 196 247 patients are benefitting from it. The target for the 2016/17 financial year is 388 655 patients.

MEC Dhlomo heaped praise on the nurses, saying they had completely transformed the face of healthcare delivery through NIMART.

“Have you ever heard of a nurse who is actually able to start a patient on treatment, interpret blood results and tell that these results mean the patient is not going to respond well, therefore the regimen must be changed? That is unheard of, and it has been done through NIMART. It is amazing.”

The NIMART-trained nurses who gave their testimonies thanked the government for equipping them with the skills to perform HIV treatment tasks that were previously the preserve of doctors.

The nurses will showcase the KZN NIMART success story at the 21st International Aids Conference, which takes place in Durban from 18-22 July 2016.

Issued by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health,