

MEDIA RELEASE

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## **KZN NIMART-Trained nurses ready to "wow the world" at Aids Conference**

KWAZULU-Natal Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, is confident that the massive impact of the Department's Nurse-Initiated Management of Antiretroviral Treatment (NIMART) will augur well for the province at the 21st International Aids Conference, which takes place in Durban in eight weeks' time, from 18 – 22 July 2016.

Speaking in Newcastle today, during a round of testimonials by nurses who are trained in highly-impactful Nurse-Initiated Management of Anti-Retroviral Treatment (NIMART) programme, MEC Dhlomo said: "It is really amazing that out of 3, 4 million patients who are on anti-retroviral treatment, more than 1 million come from KZN. We really could not have done this without our NIMART-trained nurses. The AIDS conference will give us a good opportunity to showcase to the world all the good work that's been done."

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.

It also emerged today that 90 NIMART-trained nurses and more than 50 health professionals from the Department will be among the delegates attending the conference.

MEC Dhlomo also announced a new strategy which will help the Department to cope with the expected increase in demand for antiretroviral treatment, following the adoption of new HIV treatment policy regulations.

Health Minister Dr Aaron Motsoaledi recently announced that from September 2016 onwards, 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.

Dr Dhlomo said HIV patients who are stable will have to collect their medication from non-medical sites, as part of the Central Chronic Medicine Dispensing and Distribution programme (CCMDD).

This, the MEC said, would help ease congestion at health facilities.

"Patients who have been on Antiretroviral treatment for a year and half will normally have a suppressed viral and a higher CD4 count. They are stable enough to visit the clinic only once after three months. Of course, there be exceptions here and there, but if most of them can collect their medication from elsewhere, it will help us reduce the load of patients who come

to the clinics. It's possible. It will happen. We must also train more nurses on NIMART.”

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.

The testimonials came from nurses from Amajuba, Uthukela and Umzinyathi districts.

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.

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.

MEC Dhlomo heaped praise on the NIMART-trained nurses, saying that by performing tasks which could only be performed by doctors, they had completely transformed the face of healthcare delivery.

The NIMART-trained nurses who gave their testimonies thanked the government for equipping them with the skills to perform HIV treatment tasks and save lives.

ENDS

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