

# KZN Health MEC unveils new, stronger strategy against cancer (including an alternative to the conventional pap smear)

11 November 2017

KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has unveiled a new Government policy which will save many lives and enhance the early detection of breast and cervical cancer, improving the rate of treatment and cure.

Speaking at the Tongaat Community Hall yesterday (11 November 2017), MEC Dhlomo said that cervical cancer is the second most common cancer among women in South Africa, after breast cancer.

Along with maternal deaths, cervical cancer has been identified as a national priority in South Africa as well as other Sub-Saharan African nations. Furthermore, whereas cervical cancer used to affect older women in their 60s, it is becoming increasingly common among women in their 30s. In light of this, the National Health Council has formulated the National Cervical Cancer Prevention Policy (NCCPP) and the Breast Cancer Prevention and Control Policy, whose main aim is to ensure that the early symptoms of cancer are identified early.

*When we talk about oncology cases in KZN... those are late cases because we do not detect early. If we can mount and strengthen early detection, we can actually be unlikely to get many more cases of advanced cancer that will require chemotherapy, radio therapy and surgery," said MEC Dhlomo.*

*If you want to focus strongly on women's health you must then focus your attention on programmes what will address those issues. Because now have tools to propagate for early detection we'll remove a lot of the problems that we see.*

The policy update announced by MEC Dhlomo also recognises technological advancements in cervical cancer prevention methods and new evidence on prevention and treatment approaches in the context of an endemic HIV epidemic.

With the new approach, special provision has been made for the use Liquid-Based Cytology (LBC), which is considered to be an alternative to conventional cytological investigations.

With LBC, a spatula or brush/broom-like device is used to collect cells (in the same way as for conventional cytology), and then the cells are put into a liquid medium and transported to the laboratory for processing and reading. "This ensures a good quality and clean slide which is easier to interpret, and reduces the need for repeat pap smear thus saving costs," MEC Dhlomo added.

According to the National Cancer Registry, there were 5 785 new cases in 2012 - an age standardised incidence rate of 24.17 per 100 000 women.

In order to mitigate the impact of cervical cancer on health and socio economic development, South Africa must implement a comprehensive cervical cancer prevention and management programme. This entails implementation of three interdependent strategies, namely: (i) reducing oncogenic HPV infections, (ii) detecting and treating cervical pre-cancer, and (iii) providing timely treatment and palliative care for invasive cancer.

MEC Dhlomo encouraged all women to inspect their breasts regularly and report to a health institution if they notice any abnormality. He said he will be going around the province promoting the new breast and cervical cancer policy.

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