

Nurses are the backbone of the health system, says KZN Health MEC

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As the world celebrates International Nurses' Day today, KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Health, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, has paid tribute to all practicing and retired nurses for their contribution in saving lives and improving health outcomes in the province.

This year's Theme which says "Nursing: A voice to lead –Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals" is a direct call for renewed action towards the attainment of these goals.

MEC Dhlomo says the need for strong and resilient health systems is key to realising the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

And nurses can make an enormous impact on the resilience of health systems because they have a presence in all settings. He describes nurses as being crucial to realising Government's quest to re-engineer the primary healthcare system, which has historically been hospital-centric and skewed towards curative instead of preventive and promotive care.

The MEC's message comes as the KZN Department of Health prepares to hold its own International Nurses Day community outreach programme, which will take place at Addington Hospital in Durban on 26 May 2017.

Dr Dhlomo said, "Nurses are a vital resource for health. They are the back bone of the health care system. They are the only resource available 24 hours for the patients' needs. And they are well placed to understand the complex nature of health and wellness. Nurses must never abandon their focus and responsibility to be patients' advocates in health care service delivery. So, today, as the world honours them for their dedication, commitment and enthusiasm, we want them to know that they are treasured and appreciated not just for one day, today, but every day."

He describes nursing as a noble profession that needs special characteristics in a person over and above any academic qualifications and professional credentials. *Nurses are particularly well-placed to help communities and are often the most innovative in reaching disadvantaged populations. They are educated to understand the complex nature of maintaining health and wellness, and the impact of psychosocial and socio-economic factors such as poverty, unemployment and ethnicity. Nurses are often the generalists in health care, professionals who can work with multiple levels of staff and people who provide a broad range of technical care and coordinate the work of other health care professionals to meet patient goals."*

MEC Dhlomo adds: *"In this Province, the nurses are our strong mast in the quest to realize the government's mandate of the attainment of a long and healthy life for all our citizens. The essential task of rendering an effective and efficient health care service in KwaZulu-Natal and elsewhere in the world, largely hinges on the calibre of nursing personnel that serve in our healthcare facilities."*

MEC Dhlomo says that nurses have almost single-handedly assisted KwaZulu- Natal to enrol more than 1 million patients on the Anti-Retroviral Therapy programme. *"They have even miraculously diagnosed unforeseen ailments like what was achieved by Sr Primrose Steziah Goge at a very small clinic at ILembe District. She used a fetoscope on a pregnant woman and was able to detect a very rare ailment that is seen only in one out of 300 000 cases. This resulted into a ground-breaking operation at Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital called pericardiocentesis, which is an invasive procedure in which a needle and a tube are used to remove fluid from the sac around the heart. In this instance, it was performed on a baby whose mother was 29 weeks into her pregnancy. For this miracle; we say thanks to a vigilant nurse."*

Nurses have once again proven pivotal in the Department's efforts to accelerate its School Health Teams programme. It has, over the 2016/17 financial year alone, deployed 207 School

Health Teams, which are led by a Professional Nurse who works with an Enrolled Nurse and a Nursing Assistant. Their main function is to screen learners for barriers to learning, for example, for visual impairments, hearing, psycho-social, and physical barriers, just to name a few.

During this time, the School Health Teams were able to access 6 000 schools; screening a total of 143 776 learners from Grade R to Grade 10. These feats would not be possible if it was not for nurses.

The Department has its own Nursing College with Campuses and Sub-campuses dispersed to cover the geographic Districts of this vast Province.

Over the years, it has been producing approximately 2 000 nurses annually, but now has decided to focus on the production of Clinical Nurse Specialists who have the potential to play a large and important role in assuring the delivery of high-quality health services to the citizens of the KwaZulu-Natal. This category will also ensure the availability of the District-based specialists' teams to strengthen Primary Health Care re-engineering as has happened with the provisioning of:

- 59 Advanced Midwives and Neonatal Nurses;
- A total of 54 Child Health Nurse Specialists;
- 12 Professional Nurses who graduated with a Diploma in Medical Surgical Nursing in Trauma and Emergency;
- 3 Registered nurses who graduated with a Diploma in Critical Child Nursing at the University of Cape Town, now deployed in children's ICU units at Edendale; Greys and Port Shepstone Hospitals
- 437 Four-year comprehensively trained nurses; who are multi-skilled and are able to provide comprehensive nursing services in any discipline including general medicine, community health care centres, mental health care services and Midwifery settings.
- 41 Primary Health Care nurses who now support the roll-out of the NHI in KwaZulu-Natal who will be joined by a further 179 PHC nurses currently being trained at University of KwaZulu-Natal using a decentralized training approach.
- Other specialised nursing categories deployed include 19 Ophthalmic Nurses; 62 Critical Care Nurses; 41 Orthopaedics Nurses; 272 with a Diploma in Midwifery; 28 with a Diploma in Psychiatric Nursing as well as 45 Operating Theatre Nurses.
- A total of 15 learners commenced their Emergency Nursing Science (Trauma) course on 01 March 2017. This programme is offered for the first time by the Departmental College. This specialisation provides nurses with rigorous and advanced grounding in managing emergency health situations.

During presentation of the 2017 Budget Presentation in April 2017, MEC Dhlomo announced that, together with a select group of retired nurses, the Department is setting up a steering committee that will visit all the health Districts to review and revive basic nursing ethos. It is envisaged that this will help bring back respectability to this noble profession.

Working together with these retired veterans, we have identified three areas in which we are found to be wanting and these being: Nursing Practice; Nursing Education as well as Ethos and Professionalism. Indeed, I believe that the revival and revisit of all the highlighted areas that used to make this profession distinct and unique will benefit us all.

MEC Dhlomo says he is confident that the work of the Steering Committee will bring back a culture where the time-honoured Nurses' Pledge will be a lived reality for all nurses and healthcare users in the province. It reads as follows: *I solemnly pledge myself to the service of humanity and will endeavour to practise my profession with conscience and with dignity. I will maintain, by all the means in my power, the honour and noble tradition of my profession. The total health of my patients will be my first consideration'*

The MEC also urged nurses to always remember the Code of Ethics for Nursing that reminds all Nursing Practitioners of their responsibilities towards individuals, families, groups and

communities, which is namely to *protect, promote and restore health, to prevent illness, preserve life and alleviate suffering.*

I therefore urge our nurses to take pride in wearing their badges and stay true to their prayer. We wish you an all year round Happy Nurses' Day.

Dr Dhlomo also encouraged nurses to pursue opportunities to develop themselves further by studying. *Never cease to explore and expand your horizons as a nurse. You can enter various nursing disciplines, such as Paediatric, Psychiatry, Midwifery; Orthopaedics; Ophthalmology, or become a nursing tutor. The sky is the limit.*