

# Quitting smoking and healthy living can prevent blindness - KZN Health MEC

19 October 2017

KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has called on people who smoke to kick the habit so that they can reduce the associated risks of impaired vision or blindness.

*"We urge those who smoke to consider quitting, as stopping to smoke can have many good effects on their health. By quitting smoking, you can help to possibly reduce your risk of developing several different types of eye diseases," MEC Dhlomo said.*

MEC Dhlomo was speaking at the launch of a partnership between the Department and the International Islamic Relief Organisation of South Africa (IIROSA), at McCord Provincial Eye Hospital in Durban today (19 October 2017). The partnership will see the organisation hold cataract extraction camps in various parts of the province and country.

KZN has a backlog of an estimated 6000 patients who need cataract extraction. Cataracts (clouding of the eye's natural lens) are a leading cause of blindness in the world. MEC Dhlomo said that it was extremely concerning that uncorrected refractive errors and un-operated cataract are the top two causes of vision impairment, yet more than 80% of all visual impairment – including cataracts - can be prevented or cured.

*"We are thus thankful to have partners like IIROSA who have joined forces with us to realize the World Health Organisation's Universal Eye Health – A global Action Plan 2014 -2019 which spells out that: 'Visual impairment and blindness from cataracts are avoidable because an effective means of treatment (cataract extraction with implantation of an intraocular lens) is both safe and efficacious to restore sight.'"*

MEC Dhlomo said that the restoration of a person's eyesight is a profoundly significant gift. To this end, he thanked the IIROSA, saying that its work will boost the Department's capacity to perform cataract surgery. McCord Hospital is currently performing up to 30 cataract operations per day.

However, MEC Dhlomo said it is important for society to deal with the cause of certain cases of blindness – not just the symptoms.

*"While we appreciate the contribution that is being made by IIROSA, we should also go out there and drive programmes of health education and primary healthcare. If you smoke, you are actually inviting problems into your life. We therefore need to remind people that, by the way, these diseases that cause blindness so early on in people's lives can actually be delayed or prevented altogether if we lead healthy lifestyles."*

Quitting smoking may reduce a person's risk of developing cataracts; age-related macular degeneration; glaucoma; as well as the risk of developing diabetic retinopathy for those who are diabetic.

MEC Dhlomo urged people with eye problems to visit the health facilities for early screening, examination and treatment.

He also said that:

- Children complaining of eye challenges or poor vision should be seen by ophthalmic staff as early as possible;
- All people with diabetes mellitus and hypertension should have their eyes tested every 6 months to avoid complication;
- People with high pressure in their eyes (glaucoma) should always take their eye drops to avoid being blind;

- White dot/cataract is removable under general anesthesia and people should visit their nearest facility once their vision become blurred.
- Once people are above the age of 40 years, they should have their eyes tested every 3-5 years for near vision

He urged those aged over 60 to be tested annually as the elderly have a higher chance of attaining damages to the eyes, resulting in conditions such as glaucoma and cataracts.

MEC Dhlomo also encouraged elderly citizens to get used to basic exercising, and also check their blood pressure levels; blood sugar levels; and weight measurements.

McCord Provincial Eye Hospital has highly qualified personnel who are ready to provide daily operations, the majority of which are cataract extractions; tertiary ophthalmic services; optometric services; eye screening; eye clinic; optometry. The hospital also provides training for post graduate students from the KZN Nursing College; University of KwaZulu-Natal and other relevant training institutions.

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