

KZN Health MEC comforts bereaved relatives of Cuba-based medical students

23 November 2017

KwaZulu-Natal Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has comforted the grieving families of two Cuba-based medical students from Umzinyathi District (Greytown) who lost their loved ones in separate gruesome incidents.

The father, brother, uncle and cousin of 5th year medical student Mfanafuthi Gasa perished in a road crash in January 2016. In a separate incident, eight relatives of fourth-year medical student Sanele Sibiya demised when their family home was attacked and torched at Matimatolo on 03 October 2017. This included Sibiya's grandmother, aunt, and six cousins, some of whom were aged just one, four and 12. According to the Sibiya family, no arrests have been made.

Today, at a memorial service held at Greytown Hospital, the Gasa and Sibiya families received words of comfort and support from MEC Dhlomo; prayers from chaplains of the KZN Department of Health; as well as groceries donated by Umvoti Aid Centre. The families are also receiving ongoing assistance from the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA).

During a recent visit to Cuba, MEC Dhlomo had a meeting with Mfanafuthi Gasa and Sanele Sibiya, where he provided them with counselling to help them cope. Reporting back on the meeting today, MEC Dhlomo told the families that both young men have shown remarkable strength and are doing well in their pursuing their studies. He said that once they finish studying and graduate as doctors in a few years' time, they will wipe away their families' tears.



MEC Dhlomo presents members of the Gasa and Sibiya families with photographs of their children, which were taken during his visit to Cuba recently

We are not here to open old wounds," said MEC Dhlomo. But I want to assure you that your children are coping. Even though they have been through a lot of hardship because of things that have happened, it was God's will. Both of them are highly motivated. When I spoke to them, they made it clear that they are determined to come back and make you proud. We trust that what they will do upon their return will bring solace to you, like so many other students.

MEC Dhlomo made an example of a student who studied in Cuba, whose mother was a cleaner at one of the Department's health facilities. When he finished his studies, he built his mother a big house before building his own.

Since its inception in 1996, the Nelson Mandela Fidel Castro Medical training programme has enabled South Africa to begin to address the shortage of doctors in the country by sending young aspirant doctors from poor communities for medical training in Cuban universities, while also recruiting some Cuban doctors to local shores. There are currently 2885 South African medical students in Cuba in various levels of study.

No fewer than 590 doctors have already qualified from the training programme, while 98 students are doing their final year in South African medical schools.

On 30 November 2017, MEC Dhlomo will meet the parents of KZN medical students who are studying in Cuba.