

It's all systems go for the historic return of 262 young Cuba-trained doctors to KZN

15 June 2018

On the eve of the commemoration of Youth Day tomorrow, KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Health Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has expressed his delight that the 260 young Cuba-trained medical students will be returning home in one chartered flight.

In a departure from the norm, the students will travel from Cuba in one chartered flight to King Shaka International Airport.

Normally, when students come back from Cuba, they do so in a staggered process, flying in via Paris and then catching a connecting flight to Johannesburg, and then to KZN.

But, following a successful meeting between representatives of the Department this morning (15 June 2018); the Airports Company of South Africa; and management of King Shaka International Airport (KSIA), a special arrangement has been made whereby a single chartered flight will bring the students to KSIA, where their parents and other loved ones will be waiting for them in scenes that are sure to bring joy to all.

They will then proceed to complete the remaining 18 months of their studies at local universities across the country.

There are currently 2885 South African medical students in Cuba at various levels of study. No fewer than 590 doctors have already qualified from the training programme, while 98 students are doing their final year at South African medical schools.

The returning students are part of the 825 who have been awarded bursaries to study Medicine in Cuba between 2009 and 2015. This is in addition to 1320 health bursary awardees from various health disciplines who have studied, or are currently enrolled, in South African Universities.

MEC Dhlomo said, *"As our country prepares to commemorate Youth Day tomorrow, and in the year that we are celebrating 100 years of Nelson Mandela, we wish to thank Presidents Castro and Mandela who made it possible for so many of our young student doctors from poor backgrounds to study medicine and break the chains of poverty in their families."*

"This year, in July, KwaZulu-Natal will be receiving back the largest cohort of qualified doctors returning from Cuba (260), compared to other provinces. Their return is a historic, memorable and proud moment for KZN as it will have a massive impact in improving our ability to render quality healthcare to the citizens of this province. Some of these students have not seen their loved ones in years."

"Regarding the travel and logistics side of the returning student doctors, the Department has successfully negotiated with South African Airways to accommodate all these students in one aircraft at the same time from Cuba to King Shaka International Airport. This will make it possible for all their parents to converge and be present when we welcome them. We are also extremely grateful to the Airports Company South Africa (ACSA) and airport management for creating a platform where we will be receiving these doctors who left their homes at a very young age and are now almost ready to become fully-fledged doctors."

"Indeed, these giant and revolutionary arrangements through the Cuba medical doctor training programme have proven to be an invaluable catalyst in the continuous upskilling of our Medical Students."

"For the first time, the student doctors would be placed in various hospitals throughout the province, as opposed to the erstwhile approach where their training was mainly concentrated in the metropolitan areas of eThekweni and UMsunduzi municipalities," he said.

