

MEC Dhlomo pays tribute to Health Department's social workers at their first ever provincial conference

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KwaZulu-Natal Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has lauded the Department's 280-strong army of social workers, saying their efforts go a long way towards healing and giving hope to some of the most vulnerable members of society.

The social workers, from throughout the province, have converged at Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital for a three-day conference, which is the first of its kind.

The conference, which started today, is taking place under the theme: *"Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges in Social Work Practice within the Health Sector."*

Chairperson of the KZN Department of Health Social Worker Forum Thoko Mdletshe says the main objective of the conference is to strengthen the operational systems of social workers within the department.

"We want to make sure we obtain more capacity, support, control, and order within our profession in the Department."

She says social workers perform a range of services within the Department, which the public may not be aware of, which include:

- Finding a home for children who are abandoned;
- Assisting mothers who give birth to unwanted children and want to give them up for adoption. They link them up with NGOs, faith-based organisations and the Department of Social Development;
- Providing therapeutic intervention in family and/or couple disputes;
- Intervening when patients are not being fetched by relatives after being discharged from health facilities;
- Assisting those who need special care after being diagnosed with dreaded diseases;
- Attending to mental healthcare users, most of whom have substance-induced psychosis;
- Assessing the risks faced in the home environment by abused children, the elderly and the mentally challenged, and making the appropriate recommendations.

"We believe that social ills have a very strong correlation with health issues. If we can eradicate a lot of social ills, our health system would function even better. Right now the health system is inundated with social ills that manifest themselves in health issues, and that is where we come in as social workers," said Mrs Mdletshe

Acting Head of Health Dr Musa Gumede said that, alongside healthcare professionals, social workers play a critical role in giving hope to some of the most vulnerable members of society

"That is why it is crucial for us to always ensure that, within our limited financial means, social workers have adequate capacity, support and all the requisite tools to do their jobs."

"We wish to assure them that, indeed, they are part of the KZN Department of Health family. We value them. We acknowledge and appreciate the work that they do at our health facilities and at family and community level."



MEC Dhlomo described the role of social workers within the healthcare value chain – particularly in palliative care (caring for the terminally ill) - as a crucial one. He also pledged his full support for them.

“When you consider the theme of this programme, it becomes clear that our social workers need to be supported. Any of our clients need that psycho-social approach to healthcare at some point. This is embedded in the World Health Organisation’s classification, which defines health.

“My training in palliative care is that the presence of a social worker in a healthcare setting is crucial. When healthcare providers such as nurses and doctors play a reduced role in a patient who needs strong Palliative Care, the social worker steps in and soothes the patient.

“To me, this [conference] is going to take the Department to greater heights, firstly in recognising social workers, but also their contribution and unique role that they play in the provision of healthcare.”