

Celebrating 20 Years of saving lives : MEC Dhlomo thanks SA Red Cross air mercy services for it's contribution in improving access to emergency healthcare for the poor

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KZN HEALTH MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has thanked the SA Red Cross Air Mercy Services (AMS) for its huge contribution in the provision of emergency aero-medical services for people in far-flung areas of the province.

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This aero-medical service currently has two dedicated outreach aircraft and a ground outreach vehicle, and supports more than 40 health facilities in KZN.

Speaking at an event held to celebrate 20 years of partnering with the Department in Durban yesterday, MEC Dhlomo described the partnership with AMS as *“extremely valuable,”* saying that it has gone a long way to literally save lives. He also welcomed the recent establishment of a mobile medical training simulator unit, which is funded by the National Lotteries Commission (NLC).

This road-based unit provides a cost effective learning platform for medical personnel to be trained in the field of Emergency Medical Services. It make training more accessible to staff working in the rural areas, creating opportunities for career growth, capacity building, and skills development, ensuring the efficient and equitable utilisation of the air ambulance service. *“KZN is an extremely mountainous and vast province. To travel from Kokstad to Durban, for instance, is about four and half hours. It’s the same with Manguzi to Durban. If you had to have a patient in Manguzi or Kokstad who has been examined and the doctors are saying he or she has poly-trauma, which means several critical injuries and bleeding, that patient can’t be assisted in a distant area. That patient needs to be connected to the machines, put in ICU, in a ventilator and receive more blood. That can only be done at a bigger hospital like Albert Luthuli,”* said MEC Dhlomo. *“This advanced technology allows us to help patients who would otherwise have died, not to die. The beneficiaries aren’t just the Department of Health, but the citizens of KZN. It is going to cause less panic... (for people) to know that even if, God forbid, I were to get into an accident in Nongoma, UMhlabuyalingana and Kokstad, I am safe because this Department is able to send this helicopter with this advanced technology to pick me up from there, and within 30 minutes I’m at Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital. Our mandate is to ensure A Long and Healthy Life for All South Africans. We treat those who are ill, but those who are injured, in the far-flung areas, this is the best facility for our province.”*

AMS CEO Dr Phillip Erasmus said that, in line with creating access to healthcare for all communities and strengthening the national health system, the programme is growing to include all fraternities of medicine so that even the most marginalised communities in the more peripheral areas can enjoy the same health benefits as citizens in urban settings. *“Aside from the thousands of indigent communities that are afforded specialist support in their hometowns, the local health practitioners are being supported and capacitated to develop with the support of their senior counterparts who visit from the urban centres. The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health has invested a lot into this programme and the dividends are clearly being seen,”* Erasmus concluded

