

Graduation of 1391 KZN nurses : MEC Dhlomo says nurses have helped decrease mother to child transmission of HIV; promises that the Department will endeavour to hire more nurses

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KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo says that without the hard work and determination of nurses, the province would neither have been able to reduce the rate of Mother-to-Child transmission of HIV from 20% to just 1,2% in one decade; nor enroll a whopping 1,3 million people on its Anti-Retroviral Treatment programme.

Speaking at a two-day graduation ceremony for 1391 undergraduate and post-graduate nurses in Pietermaritzburg today, MEC Dhlomo also urged new entrants into the nursing profession to always uphold the Nurses Pledge and display a positive and caring attitude towards patients. He called upon them to emulate the values of freedom fighter and former nurse Albertina Sisulu, who would have turned 100 this year.

The MEC also vowed that the Department would continue to lobby for more funding in order to employ nurses, to improve the quality of healthcare; decrease the workload on its existing workforce, and improve the experience of those who visit health facilities.

The graduation ceremony took place amid a jubilant atmosphere as the graduands' many years of academic hard work of finally paid off.

"This is a wonderful occasion for us as health, for the nurses, but also for the public at large. We congratulate the nurses who are graduating," said MEC Dhlomo.

"It was important for us to highlight to those who are coming in what type of profession this is. This is a noble profession, whose foundation is typified in the life of uMama Albertina Sisulu, who was a very important nurse in our country, and who would be turning 100 this year if she were still alive. I encourage our nurses to read about her, and the values she stood for. My message to them is, 'Look at her selflessness, and the love and values she had for the patients and for the country, and maybe see if none of those qualities can influence you in your way of life as a nurse.'

"Our nurses should remember that, 'if I join this profession, its pioneers were people like Mama Albertina Sisulu. And that there's an expectation from society for me to be good or better than her.' That is our plea to nurses."

He described nurses as the backbone of the Department.

"We have nurses in this province who have assisted us to reduce the rate of mother to child transmission of HIV. In 2008, 20% of women who were pregnant would give birth to an HIV positive baby. To date, we only have 1,2%. It's a wonderful achievement. If we were to rely on doctors, we would not be where we are.

"Secondly, today we pride ourselves on the fact that, of the 4,3 million South Africans on ARV treatment, 1.3 million are from KZN. Again, that is thanks to the strides and contribution made by nurses."

MEC Dhlomo, however, urged nurses to treat patients with care and respect.

"It's not all nurses who have bad attitudes, but if one or two have a bad attitude it then spoils the good work of all the other nurses. Attitude is a behavior that is grounded on you at a very early age. If you miss that while you're young, at school or within your family, there's no way you're

going to learn that in college. Any nurse who has a bad attitude, don't blame it on us. We don't have the capacity to train people for good attitude."



*MEC Dhlomo
with acting Head of Department Dr Musa Gumede and Ms Sindizama Mthembu, principal of the
KZN College of Nursing*



The MEC emphasized that despite limited funding for health, the Department would continue to look for ways to hire more nurses.

"We have not employed adequate staff in the various categories. That actually has an impact, such as low morale... the few nurses who are there may make mistakes if they don't have enough hands. Therefore, if you don't employ, you pay more on litigation when people claim that 'this would not have happened if there were enough nurses'. We are continuously working on addressing that, supported by provincial treasury and full cabinet.

"We may not be able to fill all posts that are necessary, but we must fill reasonably enough posts to make sure that the work continues, and continues adequately."

Acting Head of Department, Dr Musa Gumede also congratulated the graduates, saying that they make the Department and province immensely proud.

"We are proud of the work that the KZN College on Nursing does, and the calibre of students that it produces. We've been able to receive accolades due to the good work of people who've had a start from this college, and have gone beyond and achieved greater things in other spheres of life. The grounding that they receive in this college is proof that the education is really of a high quality. Some of these students have gone abroad and achieved even greater heights," he said.

The graduation ceremony continues tomorrow.