

1273 People tested during activation before the launch of National Cancer awareness campaign

20 October 2018

KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has thanked all the 1273 men and women who came out to get screened and tested for cancer at Grey's Hospital in Pietermaritzburg at the weekend. The free testing and screening campaign, which focused on cervical and breast cancer, was part of a build-up programme ahead of the launch of a national cancer awareness campaign that will take place at the same hospital in the next few weeks.

The launch of the National Cancer Awareness Campaign was first announced by President Cyril Ramaphosa in this year's State of the Nation address in February 2018. Its aim is to heighten the level of cancer awareness and encourage prevention, early screening and testing for cancer. This is underpinned by the principle that early detection of cancer makes it easier to treat and sometimes cure.

"What we saw on Saturday was an excellent response, which we really appreciate. Early detection of pre-cancerous and small cancer lesions is extremely important, as it can lead to successful treatment of cancer before it gets to a stage where it spreads and becomes uncontrollable. Following this event, we are looking forward to the imminent launch of the national cancer awareness programme," said MEC Dhlomo.

On Saturday, Phumelele Ndlela (64), of Impendle, who was among the first people to arrive, urged other women to come forward and get tested. *"We must get checked, so that we know where we stand. I'm an old woman, but I decided to set aside time to come here and get checked. I want to extend the days that God has given me on this earth."*

Her sentiments were echoed by Bonakele Mzamo (62) and Charles Donnelly (64), who were among the scores of men who got screened and tested for prostate cancer. They both urged other men to stop being afraid of the minor discomfort that testing for prostate cancer may entail (A doctor inserting a gloved, lubricated finger into the rectum to examine the prostate).

Speaking after getting tested, Mzamo from Eston, near Camperdown, said: *"My message to men is, 'Let us come to health facilities so that we can be empowered with knowledge, which will help us succeed in life and live long. To those who are afraid to get screened and tested, this is your life. It's better to come forward so that you can know what is going on in your body. It's your life, and yours alone. Let us stop being afraid. Let us come forward and get tested.'"*

Chairperson of the KZN Health Portfolio Committee, Mr Yusuf Bhamjee described the turnout as *"wonderful"* and said it bodes well for the upcoming national launch, which will take place soon, on a date that is yet to be announced.

"This is a precursor to the launch of the national cancer awareness campaign, which President Cyril Ramaphosa spoke about during his State of the Nation Address. He indicated that we must popularise early screening and testing for cancer. It will be cost-effective, and more importantly those who have early stage cancer will receive treatment immediately. If this programme is a success, it will be a tremendous advantage in improving the general quality of life of people who are found to be cancerous at the early stages. This way, we believe the quality of life will improve, and we'll save a lot of money. And there'll be less pressure on the public health system, particularly regarding the treatment of cancer, which is becoming a terrible illness."

Dr Manala Makua, Chief Director for Women Women, Maternal and Reproductive Health in the National Department of Health, said: *"We're very happy with the turnout. It is critical that people know whether they have cancer before they develop any sign. If there's a call for screening and*

testing such as this one, don't say 'I don't have a sign.' Do not say, 'I don't know anyone in the family who has cancer.' It's a silent killer, it can be found even if you don't have any sign. We really urge the people to heed that call. We're very grateful that the people of Umgungundlovu responded so well to the call."

Dr Makua said the national cancer awareness campaign will focus on elimination of preventable and easily detectable cancers, such as those that attack the cervix, breast, prostate and others.

"No woman should die of cervical cancer (and other treatable cancers) in this country anymore, because it is preventable. It is curable. It is easy to identify."

The date for the launch of the national cancer awareness campaign will be announced in due course.