

Men's Month Campaign : KZN Health targets men in the faith with health messages ; ("family planning is not the sole responsibility of women")

22 July 2018

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health is continuing to target religious leaders and male congregants and urging them to be agents of change in their own lives, and in society. At an interfaith discussion and health screening forum held at Reunion Community Hall near Umlazi yesterday, men were implored to take a stand against the abuse of women and children – while also becoming more health-conscious. This campaign is being rolled out throughout the province.

It is in line with Government's stance that the long-term health outcomes of the province can improve through health education, disease prevention and general behavioural change.

The gathering yesterday – which also saw some men getting circumcised - was characterised by vibrant discussions on the role that men need to play in family planning, including the need for them to make a conscious decision on the number of children they want to father, and help avoid unplanned pregnancy.

In addition to regularly getting tested for HIV in order to protect their partners, those who do not want to make children were asked to use condoms or get a vasectomy. Men were also warned about the dangers on relying on women to test for HIV *"on their behalf"* because some couples can be serodiscordant (also known as or mixed-status, where one in which one partner is infected by HIV and the other is not).

Men were also asked to play a more supportive role to women and get into the habit of accompanying their pregnant partners to ante-natal clinics, and also be there to offer moral support and forget the family bond during birth delivery.

Speaking on behalf of KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, Rev. Sigungu Shangase, from the Department, said: *"One of the areas that MEC Dr Dhlomo identified is the weakness in engaging the most important stakeholder, the interfaith sector made up of various faith communities in KwaZulu-Natal.*

"As a Department we are trying to ensure that the interfaith community has the necessary information and inner drive to begin to utilise health facilities to the maximum. During this month of men, we are targeting men in churches, men in mosques, men in temples. We are saying to them, 'Here are the health challenges that are confronting every man.' Over and above praying and trusting God, it is also important that men get into the habit of disease prevention, eat well and exercise regularly. They must come out and use health facilities and follow the medicinal route, in order to assist the province to offload the burden of diseases. "From the gathering that we've had, I can assure you most men have come out of this session medically empowered. Some of them have received a health screening and in fact two are being circumcised. These are the results that we want to see. We're broadening this programme of bringing the faith community into an interfacing kind of programme and relationship with the Department of Health. We are excited to see men asking questions which otherwise before, as a result of stereotypes and historical confines and cultural boundaries, they wouldn't have been able to ask. We've dealt with sexual and reproductive health, including the concept of vasectomy, and men are excited to find ways around their health challenges."

