

# "Make young people feel comfortable and welcome at clinics and hospital", pleads KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo

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KwaZulu-Natal-Natal Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, says the Department is busy with plans to ensure that young people feel free and welcome to seek health services.

Speaking at a two-day Adolescent and Youth Health Stakeholders Forum in Durban today, the MEC warned that discriminating against young people, or intimidating them, can have disastrous consequences. He says health workers need to realise that if the youth is not treated in a manner that befits their expectations; they then rely on uninformed advice or their peers – usually with tragic consequences.

He has, therefore, pleaded with healthcare professionals to refrain from being judgemental when young people come to the health facility seeking health assistance.

*"A case in point is when a 17 year old girl presents herself at the clinic asking for contraceptives; it is not the duty of a nurse to rebuke and chasten her; but rather to duly assist her. Failure to help can result in this girl coming back later with a Sexually Transmitted Infection or being HIV Positive or worse; complicating from an illegal abortion attempt."*

*The number of new HIV infections is still extremely high, particularly among young women and girls. We are told that more than 2,300 girls and young women between the ages of 15 and 24 become infected with HIV each week.*

MEC Dhlomo says the Department of Health has no option but to tailor-make most of its programmes to respond to the needs of the youth, especially young girls.

He also tabulated what health workers need to adhere to in making their facilities youth friendly; citing the following as guiding questions:

- Are young people welcomed at health care facilities with a friendly face?
- Are services available at hours that are convenient to a young person (e.g. outside of school hours)?
- Can a young person be confident that the sensitive issues they discuss will be kept confidential and that their privacy will not be violated?
- Can they access a wide range of services without parental permission?
- Do they have the option to see the same health professional in subsequent visits so that he/she will be familiar with their personal history?
- Are educational sessions and educational material available to promote healthy behaviours to young people?

MEC Dr Dhlomo said the youth is welcome in all government health institutions and has Constitutional right to be provided with a comprehensive health service package closer to where they reside.

He added that the Department is doing everything possible to ensure that all clinics, especially those in a rural setting, have a youth friendly champion nurse who the youth can trust for their health related issues.

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