

MEC Dhlomo commends Addington Hospital management and staff for effective disaster management during severe coastal storm; power and normal operations back at the hospital, following temporary midnight outage

18 April 2019

KwaZulu-Natal Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has commended the quick-thinking management and staff of Addington Hospital in Durban for their bravery in responding to a severe midnight coastal storm last night. Due to the storm water seeping into the hospital's main power supply in the basement, various critical areas of the hospital were plunged into darkness, leaving life-supporting machines reliant on back-up power.

The seepage of the water into the power supply unit caused the wires to burn, tripping the electrical switches. Although the five-hour power outage did not affect the entire hospital, it did shut down power in critical areas such as the ICU, neonatal ICU, theatre and certain hospital wards. At the time, around 8.20pm, the hospital had two adults and a 12 year-old boy in its intensive care unit. Three pregnant mothers – including one with a complication - were in the labour ward, due to go into theatre.

The power generator did not automatically kick-in because it is programmed to do so only during a full power outage. It could not be switched on manually due to the flooding, and the potential danger from a mixture of water and electricity.

This left the life-support machines upstairs operating on back-up power. But the three expectant mothers needed to go into theatre. The mother with a medical complication was aided to walk down the staircase because the lifts had also stopped working. She delivered a healthy baby, and both mother and child are fine.

The situation forced the hospital to go into disaster mode. While the electrical contractor had been called in and had begun working flat-out to clear the water-logged basement and find the electrical fault, so that a particular circuit breaker could be shut down and power restored, doctors and nurses had their hands full upstairs. They had to manage the critically ill patients on life support. And they did so with aplomb.

Power was restored around 1.30am. The two other pregnant mothers subsequently underwent successful Caesarean section. The patients who are in ICU are stable, and continuing to receive treatment.

In his reaction this morning, MEC Dhlomo said: *“We would like to thank the management and staff of this hospital for springing into action when this situation unfolded. They did not panic, but rather showed great maturity and decisiveness in dealing with this emergency. Although there was a power failure and the hospital was in the dark, they were still able to ventilate the patients. We also thank the mothers who are pregnant for persevering and doing as they were told. It was really tough. But we're happy to say that all the patients are well, safe and sound this morning.”*

The MEC also thanked acting Head of Department Dr Musa Gumede and the Department's Infrastructure Development unit for their continued support of the hospital during the operation.

The MEC said that without a disaster management plan, the situation could have been worse. *“This was completely unforeseen, yet they were able to implement the disaster management plan and think on their feet to save lives. This is what we're always saying: people who manage our health facilities must always have Plan B. If things don't go the way you*

expected them, you must always have a fall back plan. As facility management, you cannot be running around aimlessly, not knowing what to do because lives are at stake."

Normal operations have resumed at the hospital. However, only the food and waste lifts are currently working, while the four patients/visitors lifts are due to be repaired.

Dr Gumede, who went to the hospital this morning, said: *"The water, which had run down the driveway to the basement of the hospital, has been pumped out. The power is back, but the electricians are still on site. We are doing everything to ensure that the lifts are back in an operational state as soon as possible, and wish to plead with the public, staff and patients to be patient at this time."*