

Top honours for KZN Health heros and heroines at MEC's service excellence awards (reduction of herbal intoxication; lowering of maternal and child mortality rate among the highlights)

A community project that has reduced herbal intoxication and severe acute malnutrition among children aged 5 by a third in Umzinyathi District (Greytown), has emerged as one of the winners and highlights of this year's MEC's Service Excellence Awards (MASEAs), held in Pietermaritzburg recently.

Concerned about the high incidence of herbal intoxication - including the use of dangerous substances such as detergents - to cure ailments in children aged under 5 within Greytown Hospital's catchment community, nutritionists Collins Kwindu and Denisha Govender decided to do something.

According to the duo, numerous serious health complications often arose after children were given home-made remedies and herbal concoctions either orally or through an enema. These home-made remedies were usually administered by parents and traditional healers in an attempt to relieve constipation; cleanse the body of toxins; reduce a fever; or stop diarrhoea.

The THPs were taught how to essentially diagnose children who presented with such symptoms and refer them to local clinics. The initiative eventually led to a 33% reduction in cases of herbal intoxication and severe acute malnutrition, bagging the duo a gold award for Best Implemented Project of the Year at the MASEAs on Friday.

"We have trained a total of 110 THPs on the basic identification and classification of malnutrition and child health care for children younger than 5 years. They have been taught to refer parents to their respective Primary Health Care facility. All THPs were provided with Mid-Upper Arm Circumference tapes for paediatrics, referral forms as well as the relevant guidelines, which were available in IsiZulu and English," said Govender.

Kwindu added: *"Traditional associations have a vital role to play in Primary Health Care (PHC). The 10 dialogues that we had created a platform for open communication between traditional health practitioners and PHC, allowing for a symbiotic relationship between modern and traditional medication. We have empowered the THPs by providing them with evidence-based Nutrition information related to health care for children younger than the age of 5 years. Our statistics for 2018 showed a 33% decline in cases of herbal intoxication and a positive co-relation with a reduction in severe acute malnutrition and severe acute incidence of gastro enteritis."*

This was but one example of excellence among employees of the Department. Other winners included hospital teams and individuals who displayed brilliance and bravery in the execution of their duties. Among the notable ones awarded in the special winners category, were:



- Dr Basil Enicker and Dr Rohen Harrichandpersad from the neurosurgery department at Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital (IALCH), in removing a brain tumour from a jazz artist whilst allowing him to play a guitar;
- Dr Khayelihle Ngcobo, also from IALCH, for graduating as a cardio-thoracic surgeon against considerable odds, and for being a role model for others;
- Dr Lindiwe Sidali (IALCH) for breaking barriers and graduating as the first Black African female cardio-thoracic surgeon in South Africa and one of few on the continent;
- A multi-disciplinary team of Emergency Medical Services (EMS) from eThekweni district for their heroic efforts during the rescue of a baby who had been thrown into a storm-water drain earlier this year;
- Dr Timothy Hardcastle from the Trauma unit at IALCH Hospital, for heroic efforts shown in successfully treating the baby who was rescued from a storm water drain in February;
- Security guard Nkanyiso Xaba, for his bravery in rescuing patients during a fire outbreak at Umphumulo Hospital, also in February.
- An EMS team from King Cetshwayo - Mr MD Laing, Mr S Makhanya, Mr BV Ndwandwe - for assisting a 20 year-old woman while experiencing sudden complications in her pregnancy;
- An all-female team from the cardio-thoracic unit at IALCH, for their role in breaking stereotypes and transforming the surgical arena;
- Dr Neil McKerrow, chief specialist in paediatrics from the Department's head office; and his counterpart Dr Neil Moran, chief specialist in obstetrics and gynaecology at the head office as well. They were both awarded for serving the public sector health with distinction, providing expertise in paediatric health services locally and internationally, and for serving on the ministerial and task team, among others.
- Bongzi Gcaba, chief director of the Department's Infrastructure Development unit, for service excellence, astute leadership, commitment and dedication evident in the numerous projects driven by KZN Health. He has also been recognised by his own staff as the best manager.
- Xolani Phakathi, assistant director of Information Technology at head office for his dedication, commitment and service excellence. A role model to aspiring public servants, he has chosen to remain in the public service despite being sought after and head hunted by the private sector. He has previously received a gold award in the Premier's Service Excellence Awards in the category: best public service innovation/creativity of the year.
- Gugu Mlotshwa, a community health facilitator from Eshowe Hospital, for helping a physically disabled teenager to receive social support, an ID and a disability grant;
- Mary Narayanan, a ward clerk from the paediatric surgery at IALCH, for ensuring that a home is built for a vulnerable family;
- The KZN DOH's Non-Communicable Disease programme, for partnering with various organisations in an accelerated cataract surgery campaign that has significantly reduced backlogs. These are; the International Islamic Relief Organisation of South Africa (Iirosa); Al-Imdaad Foundation; Rotary Club of Zimbali; Active Citizens Movement; Midlands Medical Centre; Mediclinic Private Hospital; Life Hilton Private Hospital and Eden Garden Private Hospital.

Congratulating the winners in what was his last MASEAs as the Department's political leader, KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo said: "When you start something like the MASEA Awards, you may not expect it to have such an impact. This was our 6th MEC's Annual Service Excellence Awards and we now realise its impact on our staff members. We wish these awards would continue because they bring back that morale, which uplifts our staff members who are out there, working extremely hard to improve the quality of service for our country, and in our citizens.

"It is no wonder, therefore, that we've received accolades, even from the National Department of Health, through the Director-General Ms Precious Matsoso. She has come into this province and continued to indicate that there are certain good things that are being implemented at a national level that were initiated in KwaZulu-Natal".

"I've always said that because of the heavy burden of disease in KZN, and the size of the province, we have surpassed our performance expectations in many issues.

"We have improved the rate of maternal mortality. We have reduced malnutrition and excelled in enrolling patients on ARVs - over R1.3m in a space of 5 years - far surpassing any other province".

"We have had more than a million circumcisions without a single death, having started in 2010, thanks to the support of Amakhosi, the guidance and blessings given by His Majesty Isilo SamaBandla. Not having deaths is not by accident. It is embedded on this blessing he gave to us".

"We've done exceptionally well in many aspects. This is being highlighted in some of our district hospitals recording, for three years, zero maternal deaths. Identify those hospitals, identify that leadership and encourage them because they can easily do more. We know as the province of KZN we carry a huge burden of diseases. Therefore, improvement in our province will mean an improvement in the whole country in terms of the standard of care for our citizens. We really appreciate this and hope it will continue."