

KZN HEALTH MEC, Neliswa Nkonyeni on the official launch of the Ascot Park Hospital in Durban

17 November 2007

Dr. R. L. Bhoola, Chairman of the Joint Medical Holding Limited

Dr JW Thabethe, Vice Chairperson

All health stakeholders

Honoured Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is pleasure for me to join you today at the launch of yet another Health Care facility by your group.

We truly congratulate you as you bit by bit encroach into this inaccessible but very necessary lucrative terrain that deals mainly with giving and saving lives.

We truly admire the advancements already made by the Joint Medical Holdings Limited Group as evidenced by the professional way in which you run some of your ventures that include the City Hospital, Maxwell Centre, Durdoc Hospital and the Gandhi Mandela Nursing Academy.

We are also certain that this new baby, the Ascot Park Hospital, will thrive and succeed judging by the variety and number of Medical specialists that you have at your disposal. I must say, as a Department, we envy you for that.

Under normal circumstances, this city of Ethekewini is described as a playground for tourists, but now pointers are that it will eventually become the leader in the provision of good quality health care. We are saying this is bound to happen when taking into consideration the fact that two months ago we launched the **Ethekewini Hospital and Heart Centre** owned by Dr Diliza Mji and his associates.

Dear compatriots, the launch and opening of these health care facilities is not taking place in a vacuum. As a people, especially the previously disadvantaged, we come from a situation where the provision of comprehensive health care was non-existent, save for the trauma unit wings that we accessed. Some of the social ills that continue inflicting our communities especially those my age and their brethren stem from the fact that a majority of babies were delivered by self-taught midwives in their homes, hence no birth records and certificates.

In 1994, when we took over the duty of leading the country towards the vision of a better life for all, we set ourselves clear targets for bettering the socio-economic conditions of the majority of our people.

In doing our duty as a collective, we have always been guided by the Freedom Charter, which states that: People shall share in the

country's wealth. This statement was made in response to apartheid's systematic approach of depriving the majority of South Africans the opportunities to realise their full potential.

In the health sector, we had to transform a private health industry that was very hostile to addressing the needs and aspirations of many of our people. This is the industry that continues to exclude the 'people in sharing in the country's wealth'

However, we have, over the past years, introduced measures to improve access to private health care such as the Medical Schemes Act.

After thirteen years, we need to objectively ask- where are we and how much have we achieved. And more importantly – what still needs to be done.

Despite what we have achieved so far, we are continuing to notice that the cost of private health care is out of reach for many of our people.

- There is growing maldistribution of resources between the public and the private sector.
- Medical scheme's membership has been stagnant at 7 million for many years.
- The cost of health care is rising and private hospital costs still remain the key cost driver in the entire market.

- Distribution of health care and ownership of health care establishments (such as private hospitals) is grossly inequitable and remains in the hands of the few.

This situation is worrying and raises many questions especially with regard to the sustainability of our health care system.

What we still need to do is to continue to work together towards the creation of the national health system that is “caring and humane in which all South Africans have access to affordable, good quality health care”

End of last month we were blessed to have been invited to Phoenix where we partook in the official opening of the new Ramakrishna Clinic. We were greatly moved by their commitment to provide voluntary medical services to the poor people free of any cost. The specialists and health professionals associated with the clinic go beyond the call of duty by providing in voluntary yet systematic way their medical services to health care facilities like Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Hospital, Eshowe Hospital, St Mary’s Hospital and Itshelejuba Hospital in the Northern part of this province. In this they say they are inspired by the teachings of **SWAMI VIVEKANANDA: ‘SERVICE TO MAN IS WORSHIP OF GOD’.**

I am mentioning this because I have learnt that the Joint Medical Holding Group has access to more than 100 medical specialists of all disciplines. I am saying to you come let us talk and see where we can shoulder the responsibility in this era where the best of our

medical practitioners are poached by developed countries, leaving our sick and trauma unattended and uncared for.

Dr, Bhoola, I am pleased that you and your partners are key stakeholders in this journey of bringing health care close to our people. This is a long and hard journey that must eventually lead to the transformation of this industry.

Your 'dream of building a black-owned and managed private hospital' is not only your dream. But it is a dream that is also entrenched in the charter of health sector of our country, as you all know.

It is a step in the right direction and it ensures that the distribution and ownership of health establishments such as private hospitals is broad based and that the 'people can have a share in the country's wealth'.

In having a share of the country's wealth which health care in this case, the Joint Medical Holdings Group must guard against becoming an additional layer of cost. It must demonstrate value for money for the people of greater Durban area.

It must share its wealth with the people of greater Durban area by having a fair and transparent pricing system. It must also guard against being swallowed by bigger hospital groups as this will further undermine competition in this market.

As government, we will continue to play our role of ensuring that health is accessible and affordable while maintaining the viability of doing business in South Africa. This includes entering into public private partnerships to ensure that access to health care is significantly improved for our people. Together, we can achieve our objective of a better health for all.

I wish all the best in this initiative.

I thank you