

Speech by KZN Health MEC Neliswa Nkonyeni on the occasion of the Nurses Graduation ceremony for Amajuba District

19 September 2008

Hospital Board Members,
Hospital CEO's,
Medical Managers,
Nurse Managers and Assistant Nurse Managers,
Primary Health Care Managers,
Superintendents,
HR Managers,

I think it will be appropriate for all of us to start today's proceedings by paying tribute and honouring the **8 nurses** who died before their graduation date. **5** of those students will be graduated posthumously in this very sitting. Our hearts are with their families who had pinned all their hopes of these lovable departed Angels. May their precious souls rest in eternal peace. A moment of silence for them.

Once again we welcome our well deserving graduates and their proud parents in this happy hour that we as South African citizens share with them.

Our nursing tutors led by their hardworking Principals will forgive us for having not attended the first two graduation ceremonies that took

place in two separate venues early this month. To them and all the Human Resource Development practitioners, we are saying thank you for the good work done; you have never let us down ever.

For the benefit of all of us, I think it is wise for me to start by mentioning that the State President of this land, three years ago appealed to the Department of Health to reopen all the Nursing Colleges that were closed in different parts of this country. We were very fortunate that as a Province there was not a college that closed but instead we continued enrolling and training, hence these graduations ceremonies that we have year after year churning out thousands of nurses to our population that we promised a BETTER HEALTH FOR ALL.

We are very proud of what has been achieved by the KwaZulu Natal Nursing College that again this year they are giving us a total number of **1952** qualified nurses that include **566** of those who attained a 4-year as well as post basic programme qualifications. Surely this calls for a big applause for the good work done!

What gives us a good feeling about all this is that through this prestigious College we are not just producing ordinary nurses but brilliant ones for that matter as this year alone **225** of them got distinctions of which **68** of them are here with us today. I think another round of applause is appropriate.

As a Province, we stand to benefit a great deal from this investment as all the students enrolled with us have a commitment to serve our people for the total number of years that we have been sponsoring them and beyond, hopefully.

Today I invite all of you to share with us our hopes of delivering a **BETTER HEALTH FOR ALL**. Ladies and gentlemen and dear parents please understand that my positive attitude is mostly borne out of the knowledge that we have a total number of **5084 students** who are currently training in our KwaZulu Natal College of Nursing Campuses and Sub campuses. We are still going to enrol more year after year and thus make a dent to the meander of diseases that afflict our population. We are sure to make a difference.

Our graduates from the onset, they rather grasp that we have a mandate and an obligation to fulfill as stipulated in the **FREEDOM CHARTER** where our people assembled in Kliptown in 1955 resolved that:

- A preventive health scheme shall be run by the state;
- Free medical care and hospitalisation shall be provided for all, with special care for mothers and young children.
- The aged, the orphans, the disabled and the sick shall be cared for by the state;

The current crop of the Department's Management as well as their products in the form of these graduates have to see to it that we realise the above mentioned set of objectives.

I also think I am not wrong in being optimistic about our efforts to meet the requirements of the **Millennium Development Goals** where we are expected to make progress in the following spheres:

- Eradication of poverty and inequality
- Addressing the impact of HIV and AIDS
- Providing social security nets for the poor
- Investing in infrastructure
- Human capability development
- Strengthening governance, inclusive of a safe and secure environment for the patients
- Promoting rural development and urban renewal
- Investing in job creating economic growth

The Department of Health in this Province is prepared to do everything possible to ensure that our people get the treatment they deserve. Yesterday I was at Umsinga where I announced the construction of new clinics and health posts that we are going to build using innovative ways of construction. I am mentioning this because I want you to understand that firstly we want to reduce the workload in the hospitals and that if this succeeds, we will then be able to use the

same material to build much needed accommodation for our health professionals.

To all of you, I just want to make one appeal: please ensure that the sick people under your care receive the utmost treatment that they deserve. Lets work together to ensure that the complaints and grievances normally aired in the media about negligence and rudeness become a thing of the past. In all our work and dealings with the patients, let us always be guarded by the Patients Rights Charter.

I also have to tell you that in April this year our Minister of Health Dr Manto Tshabalala-Msimang launched the Core Standards for Health Facilities in South Africa as part of plans to improve the performance of public health facilities. Issues under scrutiny are the following:

- Safety of care which looks into patient safety and includes ability to identify and report unexpected incidents that could harm the users (patients).
- Patient experience of care which deals with the patient's satisfaction of services rendered.
- Patient access to care covering initiatives aimed at ensuring that patients have access to appropriate services within reasonable time

So basically, let us not be found to be lacking when the time comes. Already there is a finger pointing at our nurses that we contribute to the high levels of teenage pregnancy as we are not friendly to teenage girls needing contraceptives and treatment for sex related diseases. Please do understand that we strive to make all our institutions youth friendly. We are the Department that is committed to fighting disease, fighting poverty and giving hope. Our patients first!

I also take this opportunity to remind all these beautiful children of what Dr Nkonzo Mthembu says all the time, that what you have attained today should not be an end of the road; that continue studying and advancing in your profession: specialize! We rely on you to make this profession to appeal to the young ones. Make it work and please never forsake the sick, the poor and the frail of this country by plying your expertise in far away lands.

This country needs you.

Thank you again Dr Nkonzo Mthembu; G. E. Mkhize; all the principals, tutors, registrars and administrators.

I thank you.