

Speech by KZN Health MEC Ms Neliswa Nkonyeni on the occasion of the celebration of the International Nurses Day at Umzimkhulu

19 May 08

*Delivering Quality, Serving Communities Nurses Leading Primary Health Care* is the theme for 2008 International Nurses Day.

Let us start by acknowledging that Nurses continue to be a backbone of our health system, and agreeing that their efforts must never go unnoticed.

Ngaleliviki siye siqinisekise ukuthi onesi siyabahlonipha, ngukuphathene nemizamo yabo, to promote health and wellness in our communities.

It has to be recognised that Nursing Care is not only restricted to the sick but also involves preventive, promotive, curative and **rehabilitative** aspects.

Ukufezekisa lomsebenzi akulula kulesifunda sethu njengaloku izifo ezihlasele zenze umsebenzi ube mkhulu kakhulu. We are in the province that is confronted with a burden of disease, which includes high levels of communicable and non-communicable diseases from

the XDR TB ravaging our communities to the HIV and AIDS related maladies maiming and demising our best.

Nurses Day and Week celebrations are designed to honor nurses for their continued efforts to promote health and wellness and role in primary health care. Nurses make a difference in someone's life everyday!

The general public can help honor Nurses Day/ Week by:

- Writing letters to editors of newspapers thanking nurses
- Local businesses can honor nurses by offering discounts to them during Nurses Day/ Week.

I am certain that honoring nurses and raising awareness of the nurses profession will help to encourage young people to explore a career in nursing. This will surely impact positively on the shortage of nurses being experienced globally.

During this week we need to thank all nurses in the world in various ranks for the good work that they perform from the day we are conceived, born and throughout our lives until we die.

But just what does this all look like 'on the ground', where nurses are applying the four core principles of primary health care: 1) equitable

and universally accessible health care, 2) community participation, 3) intersectoral coordination, 4) appropriate technology?

Nurses work as clinic managers and practitioners at township clinics that are visited by 200 to 300 patients a day. They supervise staff including junior nurses, health promoters and volunteers. Nurses take histories and perform physical examinations and, where there is no physician, they provide comprehensive care, including prescribing medications. On scheduled days nurses travel in a specially equipped van to take health care to the people. At other times they meet with township committees associated with the clinic.

### *Equitable and universally accessible health care*

Health services must be shared equally by all people irrespective of their ability to pay and all (rich or poor, urban or rural) must have access to health services.

### *Community Participation*

There must be a continuing effort to secure meaningful involvement of the community in the planning, implementation and maintenance of health services, along with maximum reliance on local resources such as human resources, money and materials.

Nurses are the principal group of health personnel providing PHC. They foster and maintain links between individuals, families, communities and the rest of the health care system, working both autonomously and collaboratively to prevent disease and disability, and to promote, improve, maintain and restore health. Their work encompasses population health, health promotion, disease prevention, wellness care, first-point-of-contact care and disease management across the lifespan.

#### Intersectoral Coordination

Primary health care needs to involve all related sectors and aspects of national and community development — education, industry, all

health professions, communication, housing, public works, and others.

### Appropriate Technology

This principle refers to technology that is scientifically sound, adaptable to local needs, and acceptable to those who apply it and for those by whom it is used. It also can be maintained by the people themselves in keeping with the principle of self-reliance using the resources the community and country can afford.

At this juncture I must point out that we are conscious of the fact that some of the nurses perform their duties under bad working conditions marked by inadequate resources and little recognition of their work.

As a progressive government, we have gone a long way in improving the working conditions of all our workers in the country. In the health sector:

- We have made landmark improvements in our endeavors of ensuring that public health becomes accessible to all our people especially those in the rural areas.
- We have provided free medical care to children under six and pregnant mothers,
- We have built new clinics where they did not exist,
- Essential drugs and medicines are now available in most of our health centers and
- More and more of our health centers are now operating 24-hrs

- We are awarding bursaries to students to study medicine and allied health professions as part of our commitment to develop a human resource base in the province.

Our nurses must always know that they are special not only to the Department of Health, but also to all the grateful families you have nursed their loved ones back to good health for.

You ease their pain, prevent disease and minimise risk. No one can dispute that yours is not an easy task, and we appreciate your devotion. We salute you!

Working together; always with a patient first in mind, we will overcome. The **Standard Bank** advert sums it up appropriately as it calls upon us to be:

*Motivated, Inspired and Involved*