

Speech by KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo representing Premier, Hon Senzo Mchunu on the occasion of the Diabetes Awareness Campaign at RYDALEVALE SPORTS GROUNDS

16 November 2013

All protocol observed

It gives me great encouragement and pleasure to embrace Caring for Diabetes as a committed partner in our war against the entrenchment of diabetes within our communities.

Programme Director, indeed the global community is perturbed that very little is done to draw attention to the ravaging effects the diseases of lifestyle or non-communicable diseases to be precise, are making to mankind.

As a case in point; allow me to draw your attention to the presentation made by **Mrs. Tatyana A. Golikova, the Russian Federation Minister of Health and Social Development, at the First Global Ministerial Conference on Healthy Lifestyles and Noncommunicable Disease Control in Moscow, 28-29 April 2011**, where she said:

‘Non-communicable diseases, taking the lead in the structure of mortality and morbidity, cause a huge detriment to lives of human individuals, as well as to economy in developed and developing countries’

The holding of this first ever global conference illustrates the seriousness and level of concern by which the threat of non-communicable diseases including diabetes is now regarded in the whole world. It is now evident to all that very soon the world will be faced with the second calamity whilst still grappling with the crippling effects of HIV and AIDS.

In South Africa, we are bound to fare worse compared to other countries in the face of our high prevalence and total onslaught from communicable diseases in the form of HIV and AIDS, TB and Malaria.

Our coming together today is but a blessing as we all have to act and act now!

We can no longer wait for the people to first get ill and then try to fix them for the first time in a hospital or clinic.

There are things we have to initiate; the starting being that of making it known that the human factor is of paramount importance for preventing proliferation of non-communicable diseases.

Our understanding should be that to treat people is not our only task – but that we have to talk with people, to attain their understanding of the value of health, and to help them to internalize the mechanisms for health protection and the effects of the risk factors.

Everybody needs to grasp that prevention is not the sole responsibility of health care professionals but that the communities, families and individuals have a responsibility for their own health.

A very concerning situation is developing in our country in as far as Diabetes is concerned. The South African Department of Health statistics show a dramatic increase in patients with Diabetes.

In 2005, KwaZulu Natal had 315 862 patients with Diabetes on their official register. In 2006 this had moved up to 451 571 and in 2007 it had again moved up to 517 604, this year, with all the eating; binging; drinking and inactivity even amongst our children – I don't think I want to know!! What I am comfortable with is that the World Diabetes Foundation declared diabetes an epidemic.

Programme Director, this upward trajectory is astounding and shows that we all need to respond urgently and effectively.

It is time people get to understand that there are four risk factors for Non Communicable Diseases, i.e. poor diet, tobacco, alcohol abuse and lack of physical activity.

It is also opportune to today make it known that Diabetes can affect any person but that the urban poor, minority ethnic communities e.g. people of Asian descent and children in early childhood are especially vulnerable.

The scary one is that Diabetes triples the risk of developing tuberculosis (TB). Consequently, rates of TB are higher in people with diabetes than in the general population, and diabetes is a common comorbidity in people with TB.

Our people also have to know that Diabetes often goes undiagnosed because many of its symptoms though serious are often missed or are treated as common ailments but that telling signs include:

- Frequent urination
- Excessive thirst
- Extreme hunger
- Unexplained weight loss
- Increased fatigue
- Irritability
- Blurry vision
- Impotence
- Numbness or tingling sensation of the feet

What we are emphasising today is that the key risk factors for diabetes—obesity, physical inactivity, and unhealthy diets—require interventions to change unhealthy lifestyles.

Diabetes is one of the leading causes of blindness, renal failure and lower limb amputation. It also triggers cardiovascular disease which is the leading cause of deaths in diabetes patients.

We are saying these changes are most likely to occur with implementation of a coordinated range of interventions to encourage individuals to maintain a healthy weight, participate in daily physical activity, and consume a healthy diet. Discipline; discipline; discipline!!

We are saying:

- schools, for example, should provide not only curricula on good nutrition but also healthy meals;
- Worksites should not only inform workers about the role of physical activity but facilitate the use of non-motorized transportation such as walking and cycling.

- All people with diabetes should have access to self-care education to optimize the management and outcome of their diabetes care.

I am elated that we have Caring for Diabetes as a partner in campaigns to drive diabetes awareness.

What I can tell you is that you surfaced at an appropriate time as indeed Diabetes is a priority for the Department of Health within the chronic diseases of lifestyle framework. Our collaboration can be based on tackling 4 important categories, that is:

- For both teens and adults; pronounce on issues of diet and obesity
- Diabetes in pregnancy
- Living with diabetes, as well as,
- Formation of support groups consisting of individuals with real life stories on how they have dealt with Diabetes

On our own, in the new primary health care model, we now emphasize on prevention of non- communicable diseases through educating individuals, households and communities on the benefits of healthy lifestyles.

We are also already engaged in screening of chronic diseases as a part of the HCT campaign.

We also have Health Minister, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi's initiative of banning alcohol advertisement as means to reduce excessive alcohol intake in our communities. This also calls for massive support in the light of great resistance already being experienced.

Lastly, let us work together to ensure that citizens' blood sugar levels are measured regularly as means to cut down on the number of South Africans who are living with diabetes but not even aware of it.

A long and healthy life for all is good for ourselves and our economy.

I thank you