

**Speech by KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo on the occasion of the launch of the I am Responsible ... Young People are taking Responsibility Campaign by the Ward 23 Youth in Durban**

**23 February 2013**

Cllr SW Zenzile

Students from UKZN; DUT and Mangosuthu University of Technology

Residents of Ward 23

All protocol observed

Being part of the We are the Future, We are Responsible Campaign is indeed an honour and very uplifting. I must say that ever since I assumed my duties as the MEC for Health in KwaZulu Natal I consider this one as the most positive one. I truly thank the leadership of this Ward for their insight in this most progressive step of ensuring that we all become responsible for our lives.

Bantabami, we are living in trying times. The health care institutions, be it mobile; clinics or hospitals are all overwhelmed by patients who suffer from AIDS related ailments. The stories you glean from the media of prematurely babies dying in hospitals; of mothers who die whilst giving birth as well as issues of short life expectancy emanate from one illness, which is HIV.

Today consider yourselves fortunate that you have Councilors and leadership that cares for your future. As a youth today you have no reason to die or disappoint your parents and the nation by claiming that you did not know or that there was no help at hand.

With your participation in the I am Responsible Campaign, one can start sensing that as a country we are sincerely moving forward to creating an AIDS free generation. Let us all make it happen, it begins right here!

Let it be clear to all that the HIV Counselling and Testing Campaign [HCT] is part of the national strategy to combat the spread of HIV and AIDS.

Our government has now moved from voluntary testing to a service delivery model that offers HCT to everyone at their entry point in the health system. As government, we have now placed an obligation on the health care workers to explain to our people the importance of knowing one's HIV status and of testing habitually for HIV as part of a normal health seeking behaviour.

Through the HIV counseling and testing programmes we seek to:

- Create an enabling environment which promotes universal access to safe, effective and good quality HCT services

- Encourage individuals, families and communities to test for HIV in the interests of their own health
- Promote support for positive living, healthy lifestyles and good nutrition.
- Encourage and support the voluntary disclosure of HIV status and to minimise stigma
- Facilitate referral and access to prevention, treatment, care and support services following HIV testing, as well as
- Facilitate and promote closer integration other communicable and non communicable diseases in the health system, i.e. TB, STI's, as well as,

Our biggest concern stems from the fact that over 1200 people become infected with HIV every day in South Africa. If you undertake counseling and testing initiative here, know that you will be fulfilling our wishes of having all South Africans tested especially the sexually active men and women aged between 15-49 years. Know that for the whole Province we aim to cover more than 3.5 million people over a period of five [5] years.

The time has come for all of us to now to be open about HIV and AIDS. We all now need to disseminate information that it is us as young people who face particular risks for HIV. We need to caution and warn each other about early sexual debut, sex with multiple sexual partners, unprotected sex, and substance and drug abuse

leading to unprotected sex. We need to discourage each other from tendencies of promiscuity; being involved in relationships with glaring age differences in relationships and unhealthy peer pressure.

The know your status campaign should go hand in hand with **STI detection and management**. The treatment of sexually transmitted infections can never be over emphasised. Neglect in this regard leads to complications that have far reaching implications; including an inability to give birth.

**HIV testing and counselling** is the firm rock of the I am Responsible Campaign as through it, those who are negative will know and be encouraged to develop means to remain so. Those found to be positive will get the help offered and begin to live healthily. This testing campaign will also ensure that all people eligible for ARV are identified and put on the programme.

Let us all support the correct **use of condoms (male and female)**. Truth of the matter is that young women aged 15–24 are four times more likely to be living with HIV than young men the same age, and men are more likely to be infected with HIV in their later years, 25 – 49. As Government, we are committed to the adequate provision of safe condoms as we have already undertaken to give each person who undertakes the HCT in our health care institutions, a packet of 100 condoms.

A special plea to boys and males in this country is in regard to a special role they can play in curbing the spread of this malady. Here I am talking about the issue of **Medical male circumcision**. Statistics that we have show that we have **2, 5 million males** in KwaZulu Natal who are between the ages of **15 and 49**. By all accounts, these are the people who are sexually active and our plea is that circumcision has proven to be a factor in preventing the spread of some of the sexually transmitted infections. As a Department we have embarked on a massive circumcision project spanned over a period of five years and arrangements, I consider, can be made to perform it here as well.

Dear DUT; UKZN and Mangosuthu University Technology students, I am happy for you and positively wish that you take this I am Responsible campaign seriously and allow it to be your guide even after you have long left these progressive institutions. The future is yours!

Always heed the message we got from our Honourable President, uMsholozzi during the 2009 World AIDS Day that says:

*I AM RESPONSIBLE...*

- I must take responsibility for my own health and HIV status;
- if I am HIV negative, to stay negative,

- if I am HIV positive, to seek support and services to ensure I am healthy and don't spread the virus to others, be they partners or children

All of us can and must be leaders in this regard. We owe it to our children and the next generations to come.

Help is available.....Let's live long!

I thank you!