

REMARKS BY KZN HEALTH MEC MS NOMAGUGU SIMELANE, ON THE OCCASION OF THE HANDING OVER CEREMONY OF A REFURBISHED REHABILITATION WARD AT CLAIRWOOD HOSPITAL, DURBAN, KWAZULU-NATAL, 19 NOVEMBER 2024

CEO of the Road Accident Fund, Mr Collins Letsoalo;
Deputy Chairperson for Human Settlement, Transport and Engineering, Cllr Sifiso Mkhize, from the eThekweni Municipality;
RAF Board Chairperson, Ms Zanele Lorraine Francois
Cllr for Ward 75, Mr Sibusiso Sivetye, and all other eThekweni Councillors present;
Head of the KZN Department of Health, Dr Sandile Tshabalala;
Senior officials from Head Office, and those from the eThekweni District;
Members of the Clairwood Hospital Board;
Healthcare Workers;
Members of the community present today,
Members of the media,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:

Good morning, and thank you all for being here today for this significant and auspicious event.

We are gathered here to celebrate the official handover of the newly refurbished Rehabilitation Ward at Clairwood Hospital, a project made possible through the generous support and foresight of the Road Accident Fund (RAF).

CLAIRWOOD HOSPITAL BRINGS MEMORIES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, AND SOME OF THE IMPORTANT LESSONS IT TAUGHT US ABOUT GOVERNMENT'S CAPABILITIES WHEN IT COMES TO EFFICIENCY AND INNOVATION:

But before I proceed, please allow me to reflect briefly on how far we've come and the lessons we've learned through challenging times, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

When the pandemic struck in 2020, we were faced with an unprecedented challenge; but we were also given an eye-opener in terms of what is possible when government, healthcare workers, and various stakeholders work together, in a spirit of urgency and innovation.

During that time, this very same facility became a critical part of our response to the pandemic, as we built a new, state-of-the-art structure – in just two months – that was able to accommodate 154 patients for isolation and 40 for quarantine.

Today, that structure continues to serve the people of this province, providing vital healthcare services.

Like so many other structures that we built or refurbished - also in record time - during the pandemic, Clairwood Hospital is a shining example of what can be achieved when we work with focus and determination, even under the most difficult circumstances.

It is therefore especially heartening to welcome yet another innovation in the form of this refurbished rehabilitation ward, and is being handed over to us today, thanks to the Road Accident Fund.

COMING BACK TO TODAY...

Today, we are extremely pleased to accept this newly-refurbished Rehabilitation Centre, which has been renovated to the tune of R4,9 million.

The refurbishment process was completed over a period of just four months.

The new structure has gone from being in a state of disrepair, to having a number of new, exciting, state-of-the-art features, such as:

A brand new physiotherapy & Occupational therapy unit, with new gym equipment;

This new physiotherapy department is very central; and it will be much easier for patients to access services, unlike the old the physiotherapy unit, which was far away from the hospital entrance, and actually entailed a 10 minute walk for recovering patients, which was a lot.

Two new treatment areas with new beds that make patient treatment much easier;

There is also a spacious adult gym with parallel bars, tilt tables and standing frames.

It has a hand table with equipment to rehabilitate patients with hand injuries;

There is also a paediatric gym area to help children with physical and mental disabilities;

Ultimately, today's occasion reminds us that, indeed, we do have the capacity to deliver infrastructure efficiently and with speed.

It is a reflection of our ongoing commitment to building a healthcare system that is dynamic, responsive, adaptable, and able to meet the changing needs of our communities.

So, on behalf of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health, it is my privilege to welcome you all to this occasion, especially as it comes at such a critical time – which is less than two weeks before the start of December.

THE FESTIVE SEASON: A TIME OF JOY - AND SADNESS FROM AVOIDABLE FATAL ROAD CRASHES:

Ladies and gentlemen, as we know, the Province of KwaZulu-Natal is a tourism drawcard, which means it will once again welcome thousands of holidaymakers, and people who are originally from here, who will be returning home from the holidays.

Whereas the festive season is a time for joy and celebration; unfortunately, it is also a time when our roads become the scene of more road accidents.

We are all too familiar with the tragedy of road crashes, many of which are actually preventable and therefore unnecessary.

Whether through adherence to road safety rules, responsible driving, or simply being more mindful on our roads, the vast majority of these incidents could be avoided.

Yet, too often, the consequences are devastating—not only for the victims but also for the healthcare workers who bear the burden of responding to these emergencies.

Sadly, it is during these peak periods that the importance of trauma care and rehabilitation becomes most apparent.

APPLAUDING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RAF'S CONTRIBUTION IN THE RECOVERY OF ROAD CRASH SURVIVORS:

In this regard, I cannot overstate the tremendous value of the RAF's efforts through this refurbished rehabilitation ward.

This gesture that is being made today bears testimony to the RAF's stature as a socially responsible organisation...

An organisation that not only pays compensation to road crash survivors, but also invests in healthcare infrastructure development for the greater good of society.

You know... On the streets, people often joke when they see someone walking with the aid of crutches or a wheelchair... they ask them if they got injured in a road crash, and whether they have submitted their RAF claims yet.

Kuvele kuthiwe: "Uphuma nini u-RAF wakho ukuze sibe mnandi...?"

That's because South Africans loooooove having a good time...

Sifisa ukubakhuza nalabo abacabanga ukuziphosa ezimotweni, hoping to sustain minor injuries and be eligible for a Road Accident Fund claim and payout...

Nalabo abaqhamuka sebezifaka ezimotweni at accident scenes, hoping to be counted among the injured.

We may laugh about these things, but such sentiments and anecdotes attest to the Road Accident Fund's well-known positive impact on people's lives when it comes to providing financial support to road crash survivors.

Such financial support is extended to survivors so that they can cover their medical expenses, loss of earnings, and other forms of life-changing damage that they may have suffered.

However, by the same token, we want to encourage you as the Road Accident Fund to strengthen your efforts to ensure that your claim beneficiaries do not get taken advantage of by unethical legal practitioners; and that they do not use their payouts irresponsibly.

It is always sad and painful when you watch TV programmes like “I Blew It”... whereby people recount how they finished up all the money from the RAF or their winnings from the National Lottery within a short period of time.

This is money that was supposed to help sustain them and their families for a long time to come.

The fact that someone formulated a whole TV show, with several seasons from this subject matter, shows the extent of the challenge that we have when it comes to financial literacy and financial management in our society.

We should find ways to prevent that.

But today’s ceremony proves beyond doubt that the Road Accident Fund's commitment goes far beyond merely compensating victims of road accidents.

By funding the refurbishment of a critical space such as this one, which plays a vital role in physical rehabilitation, you are ensuring that patients have access to the resources they need.

You are ensuring that they are able to regain their independence and quality of life after the trauma they have endured.

That is a priceless intervention that is worthy of a round of applause.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PHYSIOTHERAPY, AND WHY PHYSIOTHERAPISTS DESERVE ALL THE SUPPORT THEY CAN GET:

Ladies and gentlemen, rehabilitation does not just end with physical recovery.

It also involves restoring hope, personal dignity, and giving opportunity; because the road to recovery after an accident is often long and often difficult.

But with the support of a well-equipped physiotherapy unit, patients have a much better chance of regaining their strength and mobility, which directly impacts their overall well-being.

The team of physiotherapists, doctors, and healthcare workers who will use this facility are all instrumental in minimising people’s long-term disability.

Their work is critical in helping patients reclaim their lives. It can make the difference between someone being able to walk again; being able to work again; and being able to care

for themselves and their loved ones.

The RAF's contribution through this facility is therefore a critical part of ensuring that we provide the best care possible to these individuals.

And for that, we applaud all of you.

LET US NOT ACCEPT THE HIGH ROAD CRASH STATS AS THE NORM - WE ALL HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY TO ACTIVELY TURN THE TIDE:

Ladies and gentlemen, while we celebrate this achievement, we must not forget that we still have much work to do.

As I've indicated, these road crashes take an unnecessary toll on our healthcare system and on our healthcare workers.

As the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health, we are already operating with limited resources, and the increased demand from preventable accidents places immense pressure on our already stretched facilities and staff.

This infrastructure, these resources, and these rehabilitative services are a step forward; but we must continue to seek and find ways to reduce the number of accidents in the first place.

I call upon all of us to continue to advocate for safer roads, for more responsible driving, and for greater awareness about the impact of road accidents - not only on the victims - but on our healthcare system as well.

Let us change our mindsets and behave more responsibly on the roads.

Let us commit ourselves to making this upcoming festive season a safe one, so that we can ensure that the vital work of our healthcare staff is focused on saving lives where they are needed the most, not just on treating preventable injuries.

CONCLUSION:

In closing, I once again extend my deepest gratitude to the Road Accident Fund for this incredible contribution.

Enikwenze kithi namhlanje, nikwenze nakwabanye.

We encourage you to continue to seek ways to improve and streamline the recovery process for those who need it most.

Together, we can make a real and lasting difference in the lives of road accident victims across this province and country.

Thank you.