

REMARKS BY KZN HEALTH MEC Ms NOMAGUGU SIMELANE, ON THE OCCASION OF WELCOMING BABIES BORN ON NEW YEAR'S DAY, PRINCE MSHIYENI HOSPITAL, 01 JANUARY 2025

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: WELCOMING THE FIRST BABIES OF 2025

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

Firstly, let me start by wishing all the people of KwaZulu-Natal – and all of you here today, a Happy New Year.

We trust that you ushered in the New Year peacefully and responsibly.

It is indeed a tremendous honour to be at Prince Mshiyeni Memorial Hospital today, as we welcome a brand New Year, as well as the precious first babies of 2025.

This is our biggest and busiest hospital in the Province, which delivers anywhere between 900 and 1200 babies each month.

EMBRACING NEW BEGINNINGS, AND NEW WAYS OF DOING THINGS:

These little bundles of joy that we are welcoming today, represent a spirit of hope, renewal, and the endless opportunities that lie ahead in the New Year and beyond.

The start of the New Year marks the opening of a fresh chapter in our lives. It gives each of us the opportunity to reflect on the past, to learn from our experiences, and map out a better way forward.

Let us therefore dedicate this year to revitalising our minds, bodies, and souls;

The start of the New Year is a good time to start a culture of health-consciousness.

It is also an opportune phase to start taking proactive steps to protect ourselves and our loved ones from preventable illnesses.

I urge all of us to utilise the comprehensive health screening and testing services available at our public health facilities, so we can know our health status.

Early detection of diseases is key to addressing potential health challenges before they become serious.

Those of us who have chronic ailments, it is critical to take our medication as prescribed, in order to avoid unnecessary health complications, which can lead to death.

As part of our New Year Resolutions, we need to commit to healthier eating habits by incorporating balanced and nutritious meals into our daily routine.

Let us avoid food that has too much sugar, fat, or salt content; and get into the habit of eating more vegetables, and boiling meat rather than deep-frying it.

Let us make regular physical activity a part of our lifestyle. Because, exercise not only helps with weight management but also reduces the risk of heart disease, and supports better blood-sugar and insulin regulation.

As we embark on this journey, I am proud to let you know that I, myself, have started the year on a positive note.

Just two days ago, I joined a group of people for a 5 kilometre walk along the Durban beachfront.

This initiative served to promote healthy living, and was a motivation for all of us to embrace an active and health-focused lifestyle in 2025.

BABIES BORN ON NEW YEAR'S DAY:

And now, ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to inform you that, as of 7am this morning, KwaZulu-Natal had been blessed with the arrival of 45 New Year babies, born in our healthcare facilities across the province.

This was made up of 26 girls and 19 boys.

Since 09h30, this number has grown to 55, made up of 33 girls and 22 boys.

Our first New Year's baby is a bouncing baby boy who was delivered at Hlabisa Hospital at five minutes past midnight (00h05), followed by another boy, at seven minutes past midnight (00h07).

These babies have a birth weight of 3,2kg and 2,7kg; and their mothers are aged 27 and 29 respectively.

All in all, Hlabisa Hospital has had a total of 5 New Year babies, which makes it one of our busiest maternity wards since midnight.

Here at Prince Mshiyeni Memorial Hospital, we have had four New Year babies so far, made up of three girls and one boy.

St Mary's Hospital, in Marriannahill, has welcomed seven New Year babies so far.

It is followed by Harry Gwala Regional Hospital (formerly known as Edendale), with six New Year babies; and Newcastle Hospital, with five New Year babies.

To these newborns and their families, we offer our heartfelt congratulations. The birth of a child is a moment of great joy and responsibility.

As the Government of Provincial Unity, we are committed to ensuring these little ones get the best start in life, including:

- Early birth registration to secure their legal identities.

- Facilitating registration for the child support grant for qualifying families, which my colleague MEC Shinga will speak more about.

ADDRESSING TEENAGE PREGNANCIES AND THE NEED FOR OPEN AND HONEST CONVERSATION:

While we celebrate these new lives, we cannot ignore the number of our New Year babies who were born to teenage mothers.

Our youngest mothers of New Year babies are four 16 year-old girls.

One of them gave birth at Charles Johnson Memorial Hospital, in Nquthu; and she was impregnated by a 22 year-old man; while all the three others delivered their babies at Harry Gwala Regional Hospital.

Their babies were fathered by a 16 year-old boy; a 20 year-old man; and a 21 year-old man, respectively.

We also have two 17 year-olds, and four 18 year-olds who've given birth.

While the ages of the fathers of these babies is not known, we do know that one of the 17 year-olds, who gave birth at Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Hospital, was impregnated by a 26 year-old man.

Once again, we are alarmed by these revelations, because these girls were all about a year younger when they fell pregnant.

We are worried, because when children or young girls fall pregnant, their lives are never the same.

In fact, conceiving at an early age poses significant health risks for the young mother and her unborn baby.

As the Social Cluster, we will need to intensify our efforts to deal with this scourge – in as much as this will require the involvement of other sectors.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY PRESENTATION BY PREGNANT WOMEN;

As the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health, we cannot overstate the importance of early presentation by pregnant women at healthcare facilities.

Ideally, we would like all pregnant women in KZN to come forward for antenatal check-ups within the first 20 weeks of their pregnancy, our target in this regard for the whole Province is 75%.

Here at eThekweni District, this target has been surpassed, as we currently stand at 78% of pregnant women who've come forward.

We will continue working hard to increase our performance in this regard as much as possible.

Early visits to antenatal clinics are essential for identifying and managing potential challenges that may arise during pregnancy.

Whether it's monitoring the baby's growth, screening for conditions like hypertension or diabetes, or providing nutritional guidance, early care significantly enhances the health outcomes for both mother and child.

We also urge all pregnant women to commit to continuous attendance of antenatal clinics throughout their pregnancy.

Our clinics are staffed with trained professionals who are ready to offer support, address concerns, and provide the best possible care.

BEWARE THE DANGERS OF “MEDICATION VACATION:”

We are aware that, due to the holiday season, some people might have taking a “medication vacation” and stopped taking their chronic medication.

This is dangerous and definitely not recommended, as it might lead to unnecessary health complications – and possibly even death.

We nevertheless wish to invite those who are lost to follow-up treatment to come back.

We are ready assist them, so that they can improve their health outcomes.

PRESSING RESTART: CARING FOR THE PEOPLE WE SERVE

The dawn of the New Year is also an opportunity for us in the health sector to reflect on our purpose and recommit to our calling.

To all our healthcare workers, we know and appreciate all the hard work that you put in, day in and day out, often under difficult circumstances – including during the busy December and January holiday season.

Let us remember that being a healthcare worker is more than a job — it is a vocation... a calling.

Therefore, every patient deserves to be treated with dignity, respect and care, as if they were our own family members.

Equally, respect is a two-way street. So, every patient and/or relative has a responsibility to treat our healthcare workers with respect at all times.

ABUSE OF AMBULANCES AND OTHER STATE RESOURCES:

We have been tipped off about two instances of the abuse of our ambulances, which we are extremely concerned about. Both of these instances took place at eThekweni District.

It is alleged that one of our ambulances was seen parked outside a tavern, for a lengthy period of time.

In another instance, an ambulance from Ugu District was used to transport building material from eThekweni.

This is completely unacceptable. Not only does it constitute gross misconduct on the part of the staff members entrusted with the care of these vehicles, but it also displays a flagrant abuse of our very scarce resources.

These ambulances are meant to save lives and help those who are in distress – not to be abused in any way, shape or form.

We want to assure the public that we will leave no stone unturned in investigating these incidents, and in bringing all perpetrators to book.

By the same token, we wish to encourage members of the public to be our eyes and ears, and to report all forms of the abuse of state resources.

If they see anything suspicious or untoward being done with our vehicles, we encourage them to note the vehicle registration details, as well as the alpha-numeric call signs that are emblazoned on these vehicles. This will make them much easier to identify and aid in these investigations.

CONCLUSION:

As I conclude, before handing over to my colleague, I wish to say, let us be the change we wish to see. Together, let us make 2025 a year of good health, happiness, and prosperity.

In this spirit of renewal, I leave you with a profound ancient African proverb that says: “If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

To our newest citizens, welcome to the world! And to everyone here, once again, Happy New Year.

Thank you!

ENDS