

## **World Health Organisation hails progress in the fight against HIV and Aids|**

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On the 28th September 2010, the World Health Organisation (WHO) announced that many countries are making significant progress in the fight against HIV and AIDS and the Head of Department in the KwaZulu-Natal province, Dr Sibongile Zungu, says; "We too have a lot to celebrate."

In a report released on the 28th September; the WHO says; "significant progress has been made in several low and middle-income countries in increasing access to HIV/AIDS services, we're on the right track, we've shown what works and now we need to do more of it,"

The report also indicated challenges and stated that; "by starting treatment earlier and improving adherence within the first year, we can save many more lives. We also need to not only further increase access to key HIV/AIDS interventions but also to pay attention to ensure higher quality of these life-saving services." It further indicated that, worldwide, still many pregnant women and their infants lacked access to these timely interventions. Care for infants and children require highest attention. While many countries are now showing significant progress, intensified efforts are urgently needed to reach all mothers and children with the most effective treatment and Prevention of mother to child transmission (PMTCT) interventions for their own health and for the sake of their communities.

In receiving this report, the Head of Department said; "We are thankful to the dedication of our health professionals who have shown commitment to the wellbeing of the citizens we serve. This has been despite the fact that they too, are brothers, sisters and relatives of those dying from the disease; they have to come to work and face the realities of the devastation of this disease at work as they still do at home".

"The 2009 Antenatal Seroprevalence Survey shows that KwaZulu-Natal has an estimated 39, 5 % HIV prevalence and according to the HIV Counseling and Testing data it is around 22%, which is still very high. By June 2010; 345 604 HIV positive people were on our antiretroviral therapy programme, made up of 103 182 males, 206 979 females and 33 543 children," said the HoD. "We have a wall to wall coverage of PMTCT services in the province. All pregnant women visiting our clinics are counseled and enrolled into the PMTCT programme. Depending on the eligibility, they are either put on life long dual therapy, life long HAART or if they are negative, they are retested after 32 weeks of pregnancy (just before delivery)"

"A study by the Centre for Rural Health at the University of KwaZulu-Natal estimated that HIV transmission from mother to child is at 6% and in some Districts such as Amajuba as low as 4%".

The Province is also known for taking bold steps and rolled out the medical male circumcision Programme as part of the HIV prevention strategy. This campaign has seen more than ten thousand people being circumcised since its launch in April. In the same month, the President announced the HIV Counseling and Testing Campaign (HCT) which was also launched and close to 600 000 people have been counseled and tested. The department is also moving towards greater integration between programmes to ensure that no person 'is lost in the cracks'.

The HoD add that; "As we move ahead we want to do more, better. This, we will only do if we carry the citizenry along with us. We need to ensure that people do not wait until they are very sick before accessing any of our services, especially communicable disease services. We will enlist partners, families and communities to ensure that all pregnant women attend their antenatal services on time and children born to HIV positive mothers receive appropriate treatment and diagnostic tests. This will not only improve our PMTCT programme but reduce pregnancy related maternal and child illnesses and deaths."

As the World AIDS Day draws nearer, a number of initiatives are in the pipeline to ensure that larger

numbers of people are counseled and tested as well as ensuring that these services are brought nearer to where people live, work and pray.

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