

Presentation of a progress report on medical male circumcision to the King

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The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health presented a progress report to His Majesty, King Goodwill Zwelithini ka Bhekuzulu at the Durban City Hall on the roll out of the Male circumcision programme as called for by the King reporting on unbelievable success.

The MEC for Health, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, together with the Head of Department, Dr Sibongile Zungu, at a meeting held at the Durban's City Hall on Friday 5 November 2010; presented a progress report on the roll out of the Medical Male Circumcision programme in KwaZulu-Natal. The meeting was attended by the Minister of Health, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, the Premier, Dr Zweli Mkhize, His Majesty King Goodwill Zwelithini ka Bhekuzulu, traditional leaders, parliamentarians and non government organizations that are working with the department in the roll out of the programme.

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health, supported by other government department began to scale up the roll out of medical male circumcision programme after the King's call for the return of the custom of rite to passage for boys at the annual uMkhosi wokweshwama (First Fruit Ceremony) held at his palace in December last year. The programme was officially launched by the King in April this year and brought various private and non-governmental organizations to working with the health department in the scale up of the programme.

"Male circumcision is one of the oldest and most common surgical procedures known. It is undertaken for cultural, religious, social as well as medical reasons," said the Head of Department, Dr Sibongile Zungu. "There is evidence that adult male circumcision is efficacious in reducing sexual transmission of HIV is compelling. The provincial government tasked the MEC, and the department of health, to formulate an implementation strategy. The Honorable Premier also convened a consultative meeting with Amakhosi in January 2010 where the MEC for Health was given a mandate to initiate and carry the process forward."

In April 2010; at the official launch, by the King, of the campaign at kwaNongoma 555 males were circumcised over two days, the HoD reported. KwaZulu-Natal carries 21% of the HIV infection in South Africa. Five districts out of eleven in the province, namely UGu, ILembe, eThekweni, uThungulu and uMgungundlovu, have a prevalence rate above forty (40) percent. However; other districts are hovering near 40% (between 35 and 39%) with the exception of Umzinyathi which has a prevalence rate of 29, 2%. The average prevalence in the province is estimated around 39, 5%.

The HoD the packed hall that the country's main goal is to reduce by 50% new cases of HIV infection by stepping up prevention efforts which include; Abstinence, Being faithful, consistent use of Condoms, Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission and Medical Male Circumcision. This is to be achieved by; Mobilizing people to know their status, Supporting people with key prevention messaging in order to take proactive steps to a healthy lifestyle irrespective of HIV status, Ensuring through HIV Counseling Testing that all people eligible for ARV are identified and put on the programme and Increasing incidence of health seeking behaviour.

The MEC for Health, who was the programme director, explaining the rationale for the programme said that the results of a national survey show that HIV prevalence increased by 15,7% from 2002 to 2008 among males of 15-49 years of age. This group has in it present and future leaders and economically viable people. He said males between the ages of 15 and 49 are targeted by the medical male circumcision programme. These are regarded as to be at high risk. But, older and younger males are not excluded. It is hoped that 2.5 million males will be reached by 2014. The target for the 2010/11 financial year is 187 754.

"We use both the conventional forceps guided and medical circumcision device- Tara Klamp methods in the roll out. People are circumcised in public health facilities, prisons, Universities, Community Halls and private sector institutions," said the MEC for Health, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo. "Our teams comprise of Surgical Specialists, General Practitioners, Professional Nurses, Enrolled Nurses and Counsellors. However; we could not have succeeded if we did not receive the support from Amakhosi, Socio-

cultural Experts, Parents and guardians, other Government Departments, Peer groups and Non Governmental Organizations.”

He further mentioned that, between April and November, over 18 000 presented for circumcision but 17,690 were circumcised. Approximately 99.5% tested negative for HIV, approximately 0.5% were not circumcised because they presented without parental consent, had penile deformities or were HIV positive and those who were HIV positive were counseled, and referred for further management at their nearest health facilities.

The use of camps has benefits, it was reported, in that it provides the cultural rationale, social mobilisation, improves access to service and decongest the existing health infrastructure.

The Premier of the Province, Dr Zweli Mkhize, congratulated the department for its achievement in circumcising over 17 000 males without adverse events; no one has died, mutilated, and none required corrective surgery. “Since male circumcision is now shown to be effective in reducing the risk of HIV acquisition, care must be taken to ensure that men and women understand that the procedure does not provide complete protection against HIV infection. Male circumcision must be considered as just one element of a comprehensive HIV prevention package that includes the correct and consistent use of male or female condoms, reductions in the number of sexual partners, delaying the onset of sexual relations and abstaining from penetrative sex. Just as combination treatment is the best strategy to treat HIV, combination prevention is the best strategy to avoid acquiring or transmitting HIV,” the Premier added.

Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, the Minister of Health who also was present also congratulated the province for its success in rolling out a successful male circumcision programme without a single death. He said he would be encouraging other provinces to learn from KwaZulu-Natal so that they too can replicate the same especially those provinces with high HIV prevalence.

His Majesty invited all those who have been circumcised to uMkhosi wokweshwama in December when they will be given a name of their regiment. He said they are warriors, who must lead in; the fight against all social ills such as rape of women and girls, educating their peers about the cultural and health benefits of circumcision, and he explained that “ambiguity in social roles creates tension, and a symbolic reclassification is necessary as individuals approach the transition from being defined as a child to being defined as an adult. This is supported by the fact that many rituals attach specific meaning to circumcision which justifies its purpose within a particular context,” said His Majesty.

The platform commended the partnership with critical success partners such - Maternal, Teenage and Child Health (MAAtCH) United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Discovery Health and MEDI CLINIC - and would like to encourage them to continue. It was also recommended that consideration be given in lowering the age from 15 years to 12 years and for proper documentation of the follow up over years of the males who have been circumcised. It was announced that a Retrospective Study is commence that will give guidance to the programme and future studies.

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