

Oncology backlogs and waiting times have been reduced significantly, to just a few weeks

14 October 2018

The KZN Department of Health notes with concern an ongoing campaign to discredit its numerous efforts which have, in fact, resulted in a significant reduction in waiting times and a smaller backlog for patients who need treatment for advanced cancer (oncology).

The Department notes that there seems to be a deliberate and relentless campaign by certain members of the media to ignore the tremendous progress that has been made to expand cancer treatment and oncology services. The scheduled broadcast tonight by Carte Blanche current affairs programme, will only serve to mislead the public about the status of oncology services in KZN. The TV programme will air outdated and inaccurate information using file material from the Department's appearance before the South African Human Rights Commission on the same subject matter

It is also of great concern to the Department that old footage is used to portray the wrong impression and show total disregard for the current state of affairs.

The Department wishes to state the facts as follows:

- From 06 August – 03 December 2018, 205 patients are booked into the radiotherapy clinic at Addington Hospital;
- At IALCH, the number is 153, while at Grey's Hospital the number is 198;
- Reports of a backlog of 8000 cancer patients in KZN are therefore untrue
- Interventions by the KZN Department of Health have ensured that there are SEVEN fully functional linear accelerators in the province; higher than any other province in the country.
- Three of these are at Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital (IALCH), two at Addington Hospital, and one at Grey's Hospital, where there are no significant waiting times for treatment.
- The seventh machine is used as part of a Public-Private Partnership at Queen Nandi and Ngwelezana Hospital complex. Currently, there is no (extended) waiting time to see an oncologist at this complex.
- The Department has contracted THREE oncologists from the Wits Health Consortium, who are based at IALCH; and has two oncologists at Addington Hospital;
- As a result of these measures, the waiting period to see an oncologist for the first time at Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital (IALCH) and Addington Hospital (ADH) ranges from 3-4 weeks to 8 weeks, depending on the type of required service; while the total number of new patients that are booked is 1036.
- Before these interventions, the waiting time was between five to six months.
- There are no waiting times for children who need to see an oncologist.

KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo reiterates that the Province has always done well when it comes to treating patients whose cancer was detected early. He emphasises that screening and testing for cancer remains key, as it ensures early detection and treatment. Patients who require oncology services are those whose cancers are only discovered when they're already at an advanced stage.

"The truth of the matter is that we are not where we used to be regarding oncology treatment. Numerous interventions have been made, which has resulted in quicker and better access to oncology services.

"In fact, we are the ones who sent reports to SAHRC and the SAHRC wrote back to us to say we must accelerate the recruitment of oncologists, which we have done. They said they were happy that we have a service level agreement which guarantees repairs and maintenance of all the machines on time.

"Irresponsible reporting on health issues, including the report on oncology brings unnecessary panic. We, however, cannot control individuals who thrive on untruths and sensationalism," says MEC Dhlomo.