

Speech by MEC Peggy Nkonyeni on the occasion of the
Drug and Alcohol Abuse
24 June 2005

It gives me a great pleasure to be amongst you, talking issues geared towards the promotion of Healthy lifestyles.

We are assembled here to show that we care and to give each other hope, strength and love.

The vision of the department of health is to achieve **optimal health status for all persons in KwaZulu Natal**. As such the employees form an integral part of our populace hence our embrace and promotion of the **Employee Assistance Programme**.

As a department tasked with giving and preserving life, we want to make it known that we **view our employees as our most valuable asset** and take the responsibility for helping them to deal with pressures of life.

Research has identified some of the problems that inhibit our employees from performing to the utmost best of their abilities. Here we have to be practical and realistic and diligently identify issues that **negatively affect our behaviour as well as our productivity**. Invariably among others these are the aspects.

- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Emotional problems
- Interpersonal relationships
- Marital difficulties
- Health problems
- Family and children difficulties
- Finances and or budgeting

The impact of alcoholism and drug dependence on family life in South Africa cannot be assessed in monetary terms, but rather on the basis of human suffering and failure to realise full potential.

The department of Health has taken it upon itself to be fully supportive of employees who are cooperative in trying to beat substance abuse. Fact of the matter is that the effects of alcoholism to our emerging economy is enormous resulting in:

- Decreased productivity,
- Absenteeism,
- Sick leave abuse,
- Accidents, and
- Staff replacements

It is the department's social responsibility to be fully supportive of employees who are cooperative in beating substance abuse.

If we stand together and support each other we will be able appreciate and concur with **Arnold Wall** in his poem entitled **The Full Cup**:

*'My strength will never fail me,
Nor foul disease assail me,
Nor loathly germ attack me,
Nor pain, nor sorrow rack me;
My ways are safely guided,
My needs are all provided,
A kindly State supports me.'*

As a department I must tell you that we are cognisant of the fact that at any stage in our career we find ourselves immersed in problems. It is through the spirit of camaraderie,

as well as making use of avenues opened to us, that we will be able to assist, support and build one another. Here, I need to hasten to add that the EAP is not to be used as a shield to those already facing disciplinary action. The department of Health, conforming to modern day economic and industrial progressive practices says:

1. The decision to participate in the EAP is the employee's prerogative
2. Participation in the EAP is voluntary
3. Objective of the programme is not to terminate the employment of troubled employees.
4. To consult with Employees Assistance Practitioners is free.

The participation of our employees to such programmes is mutually beneficial as progress becomes evident in the following facets;

- Constructive handling of job stress,
- Increase in motivation,
- Increased concentration,
- Decrease in absenteeism, and
- Decrease in conflict, negativism and uncertainty

At a personal level, a person of sober habits is less vulnerably to influences as well dangers of unprotected sex. On delivering her Budget vote early this year Health Minister Mantombazane Shabalala Msimang pointed out that the burden of disease faced by our health institutions is as a result of risky and reckless behaviour. It thus becomes incumbent upon us as health workers to lead by example by adopting and practicing healthy lifestyles.

Our employees would do the country great if they, all the time remember that as a country we participated in the drafting and adoption of the **Millenium Development Goals**. We participated in the formulation of these MDG's because as a country we too, realise the relevance thereof. The world is expecting us to have attained the following by year **2015**:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- To achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality and improve maternal health
- Combat HIV and AIDS, Malaria and other diseases.
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development.

As a United Nations member state, in 2015 we will be expected to account on the attainment of the above. We thus really depend on you to the attainment of the above.

Forward to a better life for all.

I thank you.