

Speech by KZN Health Head of Department, Dr Sibongile Zungu on  
the occasion of the official opening of the Nursing Conference in  
Durban

25 July 2012

All protocol observed

We find it very befitting that this conference is taking place in the same week that world leaders and health care practitioners are gathered for the 19th International AIDS Conference currently underway in Washington, America, under the theme, 'turning the tide together'.

Colleagues, whatever successes; advancements and progress in the fight against AIDS that are being highlighted in that conference, one thing is certain, all that could not have happened without the involvement and participation of the nurses. Addressing the same Conference, our Deputy President, Hon Kgalema Motlante highlighted some of these achievements as being:

- 1.7 million people on treatment;
- 20 million people having been tested for HIV on a yearlong testing campaign; and
- The rate of mother to child transmission having dropped from 8% in 2008 to 3.5 per cent in 2010 and to 2.7 per cent in 2011.

The Deputy President, on the same breath cautions against complacency saying: *'The war is not yet over. We cannot declare victory yet – we are only just beginning to turn the tide!'*

We must all be cognizant of the fact that South Africa currently faces a quadruple Burden of Disease consisting of HIV and AIDS and TB; High Maternal and Child Mortality; Non-Communicable Diseases and; Violence and Injuries.

As nurses, being the backbone of the country's health system, we must also be horrified that life expectancy in South Africa has declined in that during the period 1985 – 1994, Statistics SA estimated life expectancy at birth at about 54.12 years for males and 64.38 years for females and in 2009, the estimates were 53.9 years for males and 57.2 years for females.

We must also remember that in the government programme of action, health and education are given particular importance. To this end, the government has identified four strategic outputs which the health sector must achieve. These are:

**Output 1:** Increasing Life Expectancy

**Output 2:** Decreasing Maternal and Child mortality

**Output 3:** Combating HIV and AIDS and decreasing the burden of disease from Tuberculosis

## **Output 4:** Strengthening Health System Effectiveness

It is very significant that we all agree that the nursing profession plays a key role in each of the four output areas. This conference must assist in developing strategies that focus at the primary prevention of non-communicable and chronic diseases through educating individuals, households and communities on the benefits of healthy lifestyles.

It must assist in coming up with a programme of community mobilization through a re-engineered and integrated Primary Health Care system that encourages health promotion and prevention at the household and community levels.

It must agree on new and innovative ways to increase the early detection of non-communicable and chronic diseases (NCDs).

We must also find means of ensuring that safe hygiene practices are appropriately enforced in all health care institutions and adhered to at the household and community levels. This as expected requires that we venture out to where the communities are as it definitely entails active case-finding; identifying people at risk through understanding the risk factors and referral for assessments at health facilities and education programmes at schools and higher learning

institutions. Our country's situation does indeed call for a different cadre of a nurse!

A nurse, that can arm people with the knowledge to help them make the critical lifestyle changes.

A nurse who understands that we are progressively focusing our services towards prevention programmes - out of hospitals and clinics into communities – a nurse who can take the time to counsel and educate.

A nurse that understands that he or she is the solid rock on which any progress in achieving the country's health related Millennium Development Goals rest with the profession.

Fortunately we do have few of those nurses in this Province as evidenced by the accomplishments of Sister Nosipho Joyce Zitha from Umzinto Provincial Clinic who won the Cecelia Makiwane Awards in the following categories:

- 2010 KZN Provincial –First Place
- 2010 National 2<sup>nd</sup> place

The recognition given to Sister Nosipho Joyce Zitha and others in this Province clearly shows that it is practical and possible for nurses to

adhere to the Patients' Rights Charter; Nurses Pledge; Batho Pele and the Code of Conduct.

It is within our means revive our commitments as nurses to serve the people with dignity and respect. We can and we must remove all the artificial barriers that impede access to health care that include:

- poor quality of service.
- long waiting times for cards and at pharmacy points, as well
- staff insensitivity

This conference should assist in the revival of professional standards and ethics that require nurses and other health professionals to provide services competently and professionally, and to treat patients with dignity and respect.

We all like the nurses' pledge and pray that it lives within us as long as we live:

*'the total health of my patients will be my first consideration'*

I wish you wisdom in your deliberations.

I thank you