

**SPEECH BY THE KZN HEALTH HOD, DR. SM. ZUNGU AT THE
ORIENTATION AND INDUCTION WORKSHOP FOR THE 2014
COMMUNITY SERVICE THERAPISTS**

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Programme Director

Community Service Therapists

Allow me to first congratulate you for the hard work and long hours that you have put to attain the qualifications that will now improve the health status of our citizens and also benefit you and your families in the long run.

We called you in today for two main reasons; that is, to welcome you as colleagues and also to prepare you for the life and service you have to render.

I deem it very important to start by mentioning that Compulsory service programmes are an instrument of social justice, an exercise in health equity, in that they enable the government to direct or augment health services to geographical areas that are not well served within our communities.

In this country Community service came with the advent of democracy and was introduced by our first Minister of Health, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma as means to redress the unequal distribution of doctors. The first intake for medical Doctors was in 1998, followed by Dentists in 2000 and Pharmacists in 2001.

Community service has since then been extended to encompass other disciplines such as the qualifications you possess, again as this means to ensure improved provision of health services to all the citizens of our country.

Another important aspect is that besides the benefits accrued by the people you trained to serve; community service has also proven to provide young professionals with an opportunity to develop skills, acquire knowledge, behaviour patterns and critical thinking that greatly helps them in their professional development.

One Dr Antony Zaborowski who had just completed his community service published an article in the **2000 Health Systems Trust** edition where he said:

"I regard my own community service year as being most successive as the whole...The knowledge and skills that I have gained will be invaluable in my career. I have seen a lifetime of pathology in one year and I have gained confidence in myself and my ability. I have come out of this year a stronger doctor and indeed a richer person".

Colleagues, this will be a feature for most of you in terms of learning and acquiring experience – the onus will with your own attitude in terms of how you regard and approach this programme.

As a group you are fortunate because in 2003 when the National Department of Health introduced community service for therapists KwaZulu Natal was the only province that was able to accommodate more than 70 % of those that were produced by the South African universities. This on its own became a milestone for KZN in terms of

offering rehabilitation services to rural disadvantaged hospitals circumventing the burden imposed on patients who would otherwise have travelled to urban hospitals in Pietermaritzburg and Durban just to be seen by a therapist for plus minus 30 minutes.

A solid foundation has been laid by those who came before you and we are proud of the work and rehabilitation projects that they have done and initiated during their community service.

Since the introduction of this programme in 2003, our communities in the deep rural areas have accessed rehabilitation services in hospitals and clinics closer to their homes and through outreach programmes other people have benefited during home visits and this has brought significant changes in peoples' lives. In so doing we have lessened their anxiety and inconvenience that came with a logistic nightmare of accommodating them a night before in order to be transported to urban hospitals for appointments and a night after as they would await for daylight to get transport home.

As a Province we highly appreciate your availability and willingness to serve because indeed it makes our people really feel that life in South Africa is better today than it was prior 1994.

You truly give meaning to our Department's slogan which says:

“Fighting Diseases; Fighting Poverty; Giving Hope”

Go out there and give real meaning to rehabilitation which is to move a person from a state of disaster, disadvantage and dependency to that of maximal level of independency and functioning.

Please do appreciate that in the execution of our duties in this field, we should always be in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) article 26 where it is stated that the provision of rehabilitation should be offered as close as possible to where people live. Your placement out there where you are expected to spend 60% of time doing community work and only 40% in hospital settings should be viewed in that light.

Our emphasis on the provision of outreach services is multi-pronged as it is in line with Primary Health Care re-engineering and the goals of National Health Insurance where people must receive health services despite their socio-economic status.

Also, our provision of outreach services has to be used as a strategy to prevent preventable impairments; hence it is very important that we strengthen partnership with the families and communities that we are working in.

I do like to emphasize that working with those that qualified before you, great progress has been made and with you joining in these large numbers we are bound to surpass what has been achieved thus far, which is:

- Provision of Rehabilitation services by \pm 90% of the hospitals and \pm 50% of the Community Health Centres despite the fact that some of the institutions do not have a full complement of the rehabilitation team.
- The number of people assessed and accessing assistive devices has increased.

- The number of clients needing to be transported to urban based hospitals for rehabilitation services has drastically decreased.
- The hospital revitalization programme has seen the need to ensure that therapy departments are available and accessible both in rural and urban areas. As such, the Mseleni Hospital in the deep far north today boast one of the best therapy departments after undergoing revitalization programme.

On behalf of all the KwaZulu Natal citizens, it is thus with great pleasure that I take this opportunity to welcome everyone here present, mostly those from other provinces. Working together, we will make a difference.

I hope and trust that you will enjoy this year and make the best out of it uplifting our people in need. It also remains my fervent wish that at the end of the year you will choose to stay in the public sector especially in KwaZulu Natal to help the Department of Health to perform better.

Let us all concur with Richard Horton who in the Lancet Journal wrote:

'South Africa is a young democracy with pride and hope, and above all with high expectations for a fair, equitable, and peaceful society. Its people deserve a healthy future.'

I thank you