



Minister tackles Mahatma



Angel of the ward

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STAFF REPORTER

HOSPITALS are places where the sick and ailing go for medical help. However, many state hospitals in the province fail to uphold the Health Department's Batho Pele motto.

Now the Department is clamping down on these hospitals to make service delivery more effective.

MEC for Health Peggy Nkonyeni visited Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Hospital recently for a close-up look at what the situation is, and spoke frankly and honestly to both patients and staff at the hospital.

In recent months, the hospital has been plagued by allegations of abuse, negligence and malpractice of

patients by staff, which is what prompted the visit from the health ministry.

Nkonyeni and members from her department were taken on a tour of the hospital where they got to interact with patients.

At the Voluntary Counselling and Testing clinic, Nkonyeni spoke to outpatients who were on anti-retroviral treatment programmes, and answered questions the patients had about the treatment.

"I'm here today to see for myself what happens at the hospital. If there are any problems, we will try to solve them," she said.

The minister arrived at the hospital unannounced and observed hospital staff reporting for duty.

"I wanted to see what time staff members arrive at work. We at the

ministry are very worried about the patients' waiting time at the hospital," she said.

Patients seated in the waiting area told her they had to wait in long queues for admission, treatment and medication. Sometimes they waited a whole day before being treated.

One patient, Thusi Shange, said she had to spend a night in the hospital's waiting room when she had taken her grandmother in for treatment.

"My granny had a stomach problem and I brought her here to see a doctor. She was treated only late that night and by that time, there were no taxis to go home. I spent the night on a hard wooden bench," she said.

Shange's granny is one of the many people who have experienced the long wait at Mahatma.

As part of her visit, Nkonyeni spoke to outpatients in the hospital's waiting area and explained to them that she understood their frustration at having to wait long periods for assistance.

"I know that many of you are here

because you are very sick. I am here to assess the situation and help make the hospital a better place for you," she told them.

She even answered questions from a few while holding their hands as she explained that she understood how they felt and that she would do her best to help them get faster healthcare.

"We are very worried about our patients' waiting times, which need to be drastically reduced. I strongly believe there should be a system where patients with severe ailments are given priority," said the MEC.

The more than 100 people in the waiting room agreed with her.

Desmond Motha, Nkonyeni's PRO, said they needed to assess problems at Mahatma.

"Thereafter we will try to find solutions to help patients receive the best healthcare," he said.

Motha added that they needed to identify problem areas to act on.

"We also need to remind staff of their commitment to provide love and care to their patients at all times."



MEC for Health Peggy Nkonyeni recently paid Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Hospital an unannounced visit for a close-up look at the situation there.



To all nurses in our province

"Siyabonga"

Angel of the wards

MBALI THUSI

IMAGINE having to wake up at the crack of dawn and travel from Umlazi, south of Durban, to King Edward VIII Hospital to be on time for your shift, which starts at 7am and ends at 6 in the evening.

Your job is to look after and provide medical care and assistance to the sick and to those in pain. You spend most of the day on your feet and it is draining – physically, psychologically and spiritually.

This is a typical day in the life of the provincial Department of Health's 26 368 nurses, including student nurses.

And it's not an easy one. To applaud these dedicated women – and men – and to thank all of the nurses in KwaZulu-Natal for their hard work, the department is celebrating International Nurses' Day today (June 3).

People often ask what drives those to choose a career in which seeing people dying is all in a day's work. One thing's definite: nursing is far from glamorous.

Confirming this was Sister Ntombenhle Lillian Nkosi, a nurse at King Edward VIII Hospital in Durban. Despite her demanding job, this 54-year-old mother of three and grandmother of two still finds time to manage a community project which helps the poor and the sick.

WHEN DID YOUR CAREER IN NURSING BEGIN?

In 1975 at Wentworth hospital after my nurse training at Osindisweni. In those days, you weren't allowed to take maternity leave after two children, and when I was pregnant with my third daughter I had to resign. I then joined King Edward VIII hospital in 1983 and worked in different departments, including gynaecology.

In 1993 I worked at the department's clinic in Beatrice Street. In 1998 I took a break and started a community project, and then was lucky to join the department again in February 1999. I have never looked back.

In 1999 I was doing a pre and post-counselling course on HIV and Aids, and the following year I enrolled for a bridging course which I completed in 2002. Last year I did a National Higher Diploma in Community Nursing from the Durban Institute of Technology.

WHAT MADE YOU CHOOSE NURSING AS A CAREER?

To me, it's an honour to be a nurse. I often say nursing was in my blood from when I was a baby. My mother was a domestic worker and ended up getting a job at a hospital and sometimes I would spend time there with her – that's how my love for nursing and giving assistance to the sick developed. I think it's a noble profession.

WHAT DOES YOUR JOB ENTAIL?

I work in the Surgical Ward with patients on Total Parental Nutrition. Patients I work with include those with illnesses like cancer and those who have serious injuries, for example gunshot wounds, who as a result cannot eat or feed themselves, or those with special nutrition needs.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AND HOW CAN THE PUBLIC HELP NURSES?

There are daily challenges but I try to work around them and find a way to continue doing my work. For example, a patient could be sleeping in a hospital bed without the required linen because it has been sent for cleaning. My job is to explain to the patient and his family that we have a shortage of linen and why. I have to explain this in a very polite manner. Sometimes you have to deal with angry or rude people but as a nurse I always put my emotions aside and try to remedy the situation in the best possible way. I think the public and patients

know their rights and I believe it is important for them to know some of the problems we encounter and become more understanding. There are times when there are long queues and overcrowding in hospitals and yet we have to attend to really sick patients first: we have to explain this to patients, some of whom have been waiting for a long time, and if they don't understand our challenges it can become a problem.

CAN ANYONE BE A NURSE?

For me, the job is not about money. You need to be disciplined; you need to have a passion for nursing and caring for the sick. You must respect yourself and others, you have to persevere and be an honest person. Nowadays, with our diverse cultures, it is also very important to understand the cultures of different people. You must be active, your eyes should not always look in one direction, but everywhere, because you never know who could need your help.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU ARE NOT WORKING?

I run a community project with 18 community health workers in Umlazi. We also have a soup kitchen for orphans and other vulnerable groups. And we have the DOTS programme for people on TB treatment and give out food parcels. I do this with the assistance of the church.

I get three days off a week and spend most of my time doing community projects. I would love to continue helping people, even after I retire. I would also love to do home-based care and assist the ill at their homes.



The KZN Department of Health takes this opportunity to salute all of its nurses, the true backbone of service delivery



Dr Cassim Moolla, assisted by Sister Nafeesa Cassim, performs the cataract operation on 88-year-old Laydan Ntshamele-Makoro.

PICTURE: THEMBA MNGOMEZULU

OUTREACH TO CHRIST THE KING PAYS DIVIDENDS

Working hard to give people sight on Workers Day

MBALI THUSI

AS PEOPLE around the world gathered in a spirit of solidarity to celebrate May Day on Sunday, May 1, many were unable to be there. The day gave them the motivation to continue working hard in their jobs.

In fact, that's how the Department of Health's Chronic and Geriatrics Component and the Red Cross Air Mercy Service and the Islamic Medical Association spent their May Day – hard at work.

A total of 13 cataract operations had been scheduled to be performed at Christ The King Hospital in Ixopo on May 1. The patients had been recruited by the hospital and some of the local clinics.

Some of the patients had very blurred vision while others had totally lost their eyesight because of cataracts, but on Sunday they were given a new lease on life.

□ The cataract operation, which could cost about R9 000 if performed by a private

doctor, was done at no charge to the patients.

□ The department has set a target to perform 7 500 cataract operations in the province in 2005/6.

The operations were performed by Dr Cassim Moolla, an ophthalmologist surgeon, with Dr Ibrahim Khan and Sister Nafeesa Cassim.

They are members of the Islamic Medical Association and were flown to the area by Red Cross Air Mercy Service to volunteer their services at the hospital.

“We’re at the forefront of providing medical service to the people and we have been doing this for 25 years,” said Dr Ibrahim Khan, chairman of IMA. “We provide services to rural areas and have rural clinics which service about 5 000 people a month in KwaZulu-Natal.”

Asked about working on May Day he said, “It is a sacrifice but it’s worth it. There is no better feeling than seeing a smile on the face of a formerly blind patient when they’re finally able to see again.”

The organisation also provides HIV/Aids counselling and outreach programmes.

Laydan Ntshamele-Makoro, 88, from Mount Fletcher, who had been blind for six years, was the first to go under the knife. Although nervous, he was very excited at the prospect of seeing his grandchildren.

For Sevelyna Hadebe from Umzumbe, she was most excited about being able to read the Bible again.

“This outreach programme was a phenomenal success,” said Londa Langa, from the Chronic and Geriatrics Component. “Unfortunately we had to withdraw some of the patients from the programme because of infection and other medical conditions. We are grateful for the contribution of all volunteers to this project.”

Health MEC Peggy Nkonyeni echoed his words: “Outreach programmes like those of the Islamic Medical Association are a clear indication that if government and other sectors work together we can make a tangible difference in the lives of people.”

MEC in Geneva



Provincial Health MEC Peggy Nkonyeni and Dr Lindiwe Makhubalo, Chief Director for Health Information Research, during the World Health Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland. National Health Minister Dr Manto Tshabalala-Msimang led the high level South African delegation to the WHA, which included Free State Health MEC Sakhiwo Balot and KwaZulu-Natal's Health MEC as well as other senior officials from the Department of Health. The Assembly was held from May 16-25



To all nurses in our province

“Siyabonga”

The smile makes it worthwhile

MBALI THUSI

SINCE her parents died last year, 13-year-old Banqobile Nzuza from Ubombo in northern KwaZulu-Natal, who is in Grade 4, has lived with her grandmother. Life can be tough for a teenager living with an elderly person – especially when both are equally dependent on each other. Luckily, Banqobile has two uncles who both work in Hluhluwe and she and her grandmother can occasionally rely on them to help make ends meet.

Her story is not unique. Many homesteads in the area are child-headed or consist entirely of orphans. For many of these children, HIV/Aids is a reality, forcing them to learn to fend for themselves.

These are some of the stories that have touched the hearts of many, including the South African Red Cross Air Mercy Service, East Coast Radio, Rotary and the Gift of the Givers Foundation. The South African Red Cross Air Mercy Service provides a flying doctor service to remote areas in KwaZulu-Natal and works in partnership with the provincial Department of Health.

As the winter season approaches, they are rolling out their Winter Warmth Campaign. It recently kicked off at Bethesda Hospital in

the Ubombo area. Orphans and the community's neediest inhabitants were asked to gather at the hospital, and Banqobile was one of those who made the long walk there.

Not knowing what was in store for her, Banqobile sat quietly as Trish Gloss from the Red Cross Air Mercy Service and radio personality Damon Beard greeted her. Damon and Trish had come bearing gifts – blankets. When she received her blanket Banqobile's face lit up with a smile.

"I have only one blanket at home and I always have a problem when I wash it and hang it out to dry if there is not enough sunshine. But now I won't have that problem anymore," she said.

Said Damon Beard: "This is a moving experience and I salute the Red Cross Air Mercy Service for the work they are doing."

Almost 100 blankets were handed out from the outpatients' department and at the ARV clinic at Bethesda hospital to help keep the community warm this winter – and a big thank you to East Coast Radio listeners for supporting this initiative.

For orphans like Banqobile, it gives them hope and comfort to know that someone out there cares. The smile on their faces said it all.



Shalaine Maharaj, Philile Xaba, Claire Cooper and Alice Sithole enjoy their evening at the Health Department dinner.

A celebration

PHILANI MAKHANYA

EMPLOYEES in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health were upbeat and positive about the future of the Department and its ability to deliver health care to millions of people in the province after their newly appointed MEC Peggy Nkonyeni delivered her maiden budget speech at the KZN legislature in Pietermaritzburg.

Health officials have also described Nkonyeni as a "visionary" who is capable of building on the foundation laid by her predecessor.

This emerged at a swish function organised by the Department of Health to officially welcome Nkonyeni and to congratulate her for working around the clock to ensure that the province's R10,3 billion budget improves the quality of public health care in the province.



Mec for health in KwaZulu-Natal, Peggy Nkonyeni enjoys a moment with Sbongile Dube, District Manager for Ilembe.



Banqobile, wrapped up in her blanket, with East Coast Radio DJ Damon Beard at Bethesda Hospital during the Winter Warmth Campaign.

PICTURE: THEMBA MINGOMEZULU



Kantha Padayachee, from legal services, Dr Lesley Gumede, Health Department Ombudsperson, and Prash Padayachee, Manager of Special Support Services, discuss the budget.



The KZN Department of Health takes this opportunity to salute all of its nurses, the true backbone of service delivery



Dr Sbongile Zungu with Dr Lindiwe Smelane (red dress) and Mtholephi Mthimkhulu enjoy the dinner with the Department of Health staff.

ALL PICTURES: THEMBA MNGOMEZULU



Thobile Thiyane and Nonhlanhla Muthwa queue for their food at the dinner.



Ka Shabalala, Dennis Luthuli, Dr Sbongiseni Dlomo and Lucky Shabalala were just some of the smart guests at the dinner.

Department of Health staff enjoy the function.

of a vibrant and progressive department

The function, held in Pietermaritzburg at the Premier's official residence in Parkside, was used to honour former KZN Health MEC Zweli Mkhize, now MEC for Finance and Economic Development.

High profile guests included the Director General in the Department, Prof Ronald Green-Thompson, chairperson of the Health Portfolio Committee Lydia Johnson, and ANC Chief Whip Mtholephi Mthimkhulu.

Senior managers of the department, local government councillors and members of the KwaZulu-Natal legislature were also in attendance.

Nkonyeni, whose budget speech placed much emphasis on the need to tackle the poor state of some health facilities, reminded her employees that April had been declared a health month.

"This is the year where people should look after their bodies by exercising and having good

nutrition," she said.

Of her budget speech, Nkonyeni described it as a "bottom-up approach", saying all relevant parties were consulted during the planning stages.

"This is a special evening for me, especially after presenting my maiden budget speech, and I wish to thank all of those who contributed to the process," she said.

Nkonyeni also received a pat on the back for involving every department employee in the formulation of the health budget.

"She has taken all managers to task to explain in detail what they want to do in the 2005/06 financial year and we appreciate the interrogation which has ensured we have a budget that will address the health needs of the people of KwaZulu-Natal," said Dr Sibongile Zungu, Senior General Manager of the Health Services Cluster.

Zungu also revealed that

Mkhize's departure had left everyone in the department feeling uncertain about the future.

"When Mkhize left the department, we did not think we were going to cope. We all thought he understood the department and that there was nothing left on which to improve. However, we soon discovered that there was a lot that we did not know and that was because of Nkonyeni's work ethic and commitment to delivering health care to our people," she said.

Lindiwe Khuzwayo, spokesperson of the Health Department, said it was unfortunate that the department was criticised by the media when something went wrong, but its achievements were always ignored.

"On behalf of the MEC we want them to know that the department cannot do enough to thank these employees for their tireless effort," said Khuzwayo.



To all nurses in our province

"Siyabonga"



GOOD NEWS FOR KZN

Real increase in health budget

UNWELE REPORTER

GOOD news for the province is that for the first time since 1989/99 there has been a real increase in our provincial Health Budget.

However, said Health MEC Peggy Nkonyeni in her budget speech, although the total amount of R10.3 billion requested for the financial year reflects an increase of R1 503 million compared with the revised budget for 2004/5 – or a 16.9% increase – it was important to note that services in some areas were still below the minimum acceptable levels that the department was committed to provide, or to narrow the gap of inequality.

Nevertheless, she added, the increase would still help the department improve the quality of its service.

She listed four main areas of concern that were to have priority in the budget allocation:

- The provision of primary health care services in some underserved areas, indicating a shortfall of about 200 additional clinics;
- The provision of Emergency Medical and Rescue Services, which requires a 50% increase in funds for the required service provision, of which only 30% can be tackled in the current financial year;
- Tackling the poor state of some of the health facilities to improve the facility asset register to meet the demands, requiring the doubling of the current infrastructure activities programme;
- And improving the quality of services with additional personnel.

She said the new budget allocation would help the department in its quest to ensure all hospitals, clinics and health centres were better equipped to prevent and reduce maternal and child deaths, and to focus on mother and child health, and highlighted the strategic objective to strengthen nutrition enhancing programmes for all vulnerable groups.

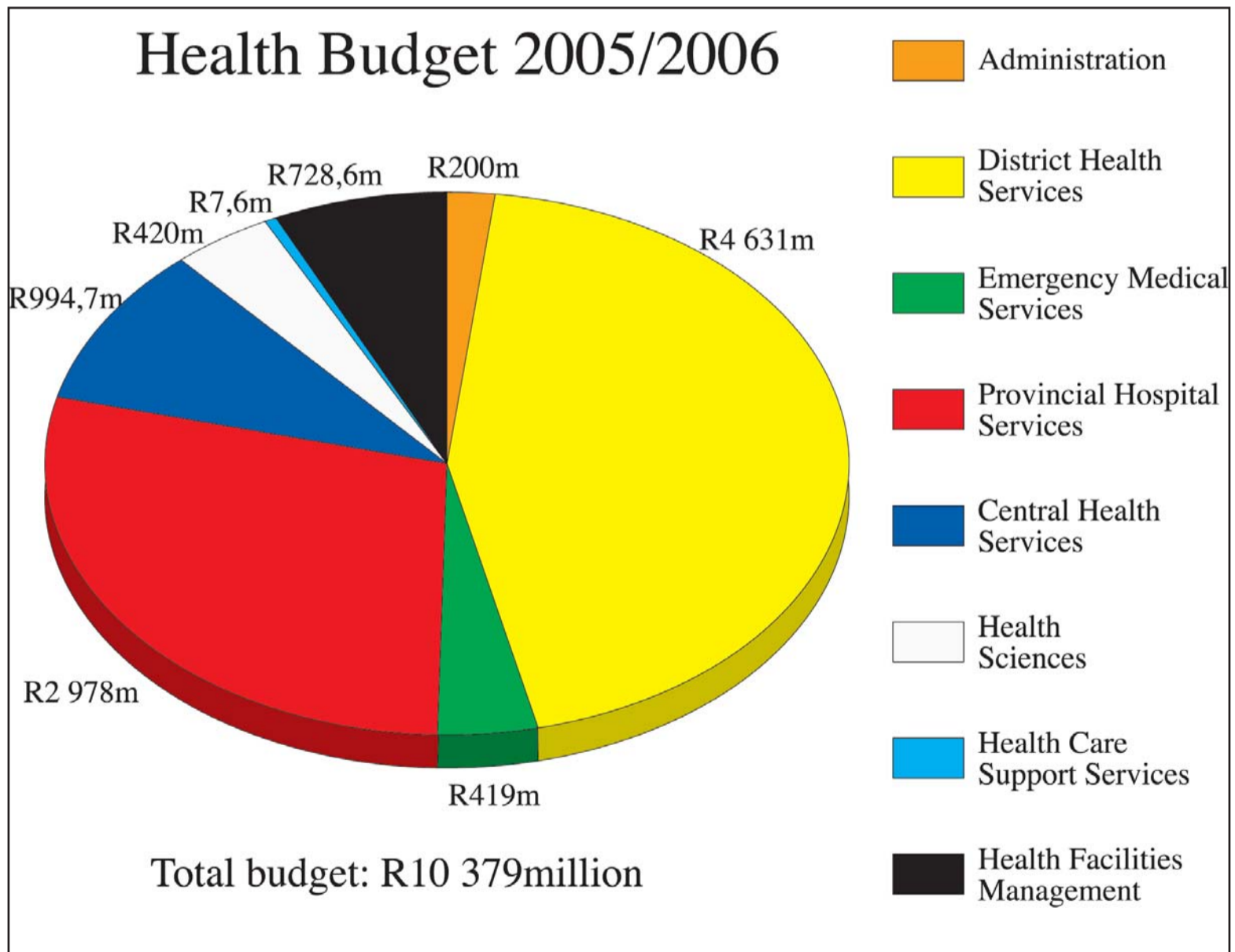
Children under five comprise one group that has been overlooked in nutrition enhancing supplementation, and there is now a programme for nutritional supplements for them. There would also be some relief for HIV and Aids patients, and the Khomanani programme would see an improvement in laboratory services, information systems,

human resources and capacity development, drug procurements and distribution, among others.

The MEC paid tribute to those in the province who have taken up the challenging task of caring for people living with HIV and Aids, and said a number of home-based care facilities had been set up by people committed to making a positive difference. She referred to the World Health Organisation's belief that "health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not just an absence of disease or infirmity", and said screening programmes would be put in place so that diseases like hypertension and diabetes could be identified timeously.

There would also be more encouragement for people to follow healthy lifestyles to reduce obesity.

The old haven't been neglected either, and the cataract diagnosis and surgery programme, which had already helped about 5 500 people, will be extended. It is hoped that 7 000 people would have been attended to by March 2006.



To all nurses in our province

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