

STATEMENT BY KZN HEALTH MEC, DR SIBONGISENI DHLOMO ON THE OCCASION OF WELCOMING COMMUNITY SERVICE AND INTERNS PLACED TO SERVE THE PROVINCE IN 2012

We are here to say congratulation to all the Healthcare Professionals who have joined us as Community Service Officers and Interns to complete their training and to make themselves; their parents and their country proud.

This year, as a Department we have 425 Community Service Officers spread across the Province to serve our people in multiple disciplines. These are in the following categories;

- 152 Medical Officers
- 57 Radiographers
- 40 Physiotherapists
- 37 Pharmacists
- 34 Environmental Health Practitioners
- 32 Occupational Therapists
- 31 Dieticians
- 30 Audio and Speech Therapists
- 12 Physiotherapists

For all your accomplishments and achievements, our message is summed up by what our Health Minister, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi says:

'You must remember that your achievement today is not the end of the road of your struggle but the beginning of yet another phase of challenges in your working lives. It is the dawn of a new phase that comes with even greater responsibilities, that requires accountability, strategic leadership and adherence to the pledge that you made to keep up ethics of the health professions.'

We are glad to have you here and hope that you will serve our sick and frail with diligence and utmost care as this is a profession that puts to the test your individual values of respect, dignity, care, passion and compassion.

Cicero once said; "In nothing do men more nearly approach the gods than in giving health to men."

We are appealing to you to work with us to give our people the respect and dignity they deserve. Always remember that Health is a Human Right!

With that in mind, today we are also here to announce a ground breaking undertaking that will begin to enhance the number of doctors produced for our country.

It will be recalled that in December last year I visited Cuba and we came back with an agreement from authorities there that Cuba is now prepared to accept quite a sizeable number of students who want to pursue Medical studies provided their parents would pay for tuition.

It is an undeniable reality that in this country every year tens of students' dreams of studying medicine are shuttered when Universities reject their applications to enter medical schools. Many of these have very good results and their parents have set aside investments for their children studies, however, due to limited spaces in the South African Universities many are forced to change career choices or idle at home until space is found for their studies.

One student who had an opportunity to study in Cuba once said;

"I feel as if I'm standing on the backs of all my ancestors. This is a huge opportunity for me. I wanted to be a doctor, but I wasn't sure how to get into medicine. I had decent results, but I didn't have any money, and even applying to medical school cost a lot."

The Cuban health care system in which these students are working is exceptional for a country like ours and represents an important accomplishment of our democratic government. Although this programme makes political point for Cuba, it also represents an extraordinary humanitarian contribution to the world's poor populations.

This new development reinforces our efforts wherein annually the KZN Department of Health issues bursaries to students to pursue health related courses in the Universities across South Africa as well as granting opportunities to students from poor backgrounds to study medicine in Cuba and reach for their dreams.

We are thus very elated about this undertaking considering that the University of KwaZulu Natal does not admit more than 200 first year students intending to study Medicine. This also applies to the 8 [eighth] Medical Schools spread across South Africa, that combined their intake does not exceed 2000 first year students.

As earlier indicated, more and more of our students get to be frustrated every year as there is really no other alternative study discipline for a person geared towards becoming a Doctor.

Of course the student has to apply and then qualify, but it's not money that matters, its motivation and readiness to serve the under-served communities.

We are very excited as a Department and Province that we have reached this agreement with our friends in Cuba. There is no doubt in my mind that Cuba is a power of humanity, solidarity and fraternal love. This opportunity will ensure that those students who did not get spaces in South African Universities realize their dreams and come back to serve the people of this Province known to be the epicentre for: HIV, TB; Maternal and Child morbidity and mortality; Chronic diseases of lifestyle and Trauma and Violence.

Thank you and Happy New Year

ISSUED BY:

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