

Opening address by KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo on the occasion of the 17th Rural Health Conference held in St Lucia, KZN

8 August 2013

We acknowledge and thank Dr Bernhard Gaede who has worked and succeeded in pulling all of us together to come and deliberate on health matters that concern marginalised communities residing in the rural settings.

We appreciate the presence of David Hirsh from the Harvard University; Thandeka Mazibuko from Sinomusanothando Community Development as well as Sarah Rule from CREATE

We salute RUDASA Chairperson, Dr Desmond Kegakilwe; RuReSA Representative, Maryke Bezuidenhout; PACASA Chairperson, Edwin Leballo and Rural Health Advocacy Project Director, Marije Versteeg

Colleagues, Good Evening,

The love for your country and commitment to the marginalised communities is unquestionable judging from the fact that you were able to sacrifice your long weekend to come here at St Lucia to discuss how we can again take charge of our health services under the theme 'Going back to the Roots.'

I also appreciate the fact that you chose August 9 to begin with your deliberations, it being a significant and memorable day for the struggle of the women of this to be heard and be given a chance to live better and healthier in their own country.

ALIBONGWE IGAMA LAMAKHOSIKAZI. WATHINTA ABAFAZI, WATHINTA IMBOKODO; UZOKUFA!!!

Allow me to start by thanking all the health care professionals who have chosen the rural areas as the site and theatre to perform their clinical and curative skills. As Government we try to spread and distribute personnel through various schemes including community service and internship but it being a democratic country, we cannot compel people to remain there as much as we would prefer. We thus thank all those that have decided in their consciousness that people in rural areas are people as well.

Rural health, we have to agree, is about saving mothers; saving babies. It is not about tendering to men's wounds inflicted and borne out of faction and stick fights.

Dr Bernhard Gaede, the choice of the Theme: 'Going back to the Roots' is coincidental as in our Department we talk of 'Going back to the Basics.'

On being asked to make opening remarks for this august gathering I thought it wise to report on measures we have adopted as a Province in enhancing the health being of our people particularly those with restricted access to health care services. This I am doing to benefit those in similar situation as us and also to invite further inputs on how to better our initiatives.

Allow me to start by indicating that the health of women and babies has been given a priority status by the Cabinet of KwaZulu Natal.

Our initiatives is influenced by the fact that high maternal, perinatal and under-five morbidity remain a challenge for our country in general and the realisation that the large number of deaths are borne out of preventable causes.

We were very elated when our Province was chosen as a site to launch the Campaign on Accelerated Reduction of Maternal and Child Mortality in Africa (CARMMA) in 2012. Since then we have not looked back but have followed the guidelines given including:

- Ensuring that all hospitals have people trained as Master Trainers in Essential Steps in the Management of Obstetric emergencies [ESMOEJ]
- Initiating Midwifery Training that has covered:
 - ◆ 125 Advanced Midwives
 - ◆ 350 one year Midwives
 - ◆ 640 forth year Midwives
 - ◆ Sending 55 Midwives from Hospitals and Primary Health Care Clinics to a Midwifery Congress in December 2012
- We have also developed an Early booking Antenatal Care strategy where community dialogues have played major role in improving this. We now have 29 implementers trained to date. Though we still have a lot of ground to cover, we can report that early booking coverage has moved from 37% in 10/11, to 46.9% Q4 12/13.

- We have purchased and distributed 38 Obstetric and Neonatal Ambulances with a view to improve access to emergency transport for this designated category and no one else.
- We have endorsed the notion of the Maternity Waiting Homes especially in rural areas where there are challenges with emergency transport. Almost all the clinics we are now constructing incorporate this facility.
- As means to Improve Child Survival; Kangaroo Mother Care [KMC] policy for hospitals was developed and 42 out of 54 hospitals now have this. This is essential for the survival of pre-term babies.
- Perinatal Problem Identification Program [PPIP] Software has been installed in all hospitals conducting deliveries and 17 out of 53 hospitals are already using it.
- For Child Health we have recently seen Phila Mntwana campaign being launched with the support of our Hon Premier, Dr Zweli Mkhize. Intention here is to create Phila Mntwana Centres that will be used to detect **malnutrition early and to serve as a platform for identification and referral of other health problems** in children less than 5 years. These Centres will form integral part of the war rooms and are therefore linked to Operation Sukuma Sakhe.

- We also have support from our Majesty the King in our Immunization Campaign. He has accompanied us whilst conducted it and uses His own platforms to call on women to immunize their babies
- For all the communities that do not have a clinic we are also providing mobile clinic services that offer a primary health package
- We have also conducted Aggressive Comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive health training, including IUCD insertions training targeting Professional nurses and Doctors who we intend to use as Master Trainers. Our focus here is Family Planning and tuition is on the new National Contraceptive and fertility policy. Very soon at UMkhanyakude we will be launching the "ZAZI" Women and Girls National campaign as means to empower young girls about their sexuality.
- We can also report on the successes of our Aggressive HIV Management Strategy that has seen PHC nurses trained on NIRMAT to improve ART initiation. Currently there are no people on waiting list and this indeed has marked reduction on maternal deaths from HIV and aids compared to previous years.

Programme Director, our Province is vast and it is an undeniable fact that rural areas still experience a lack of specialist skills, equipment and facilities. To make up for this we have initiated a **Planned patient**

transport service providing vehicles where multiple patients can be transported simultaneously; these include buses with seats for seated patients; wheelchair facilities for patients requiring a wheelchair and stretchers for patients requiring a stretcher. The service is designed to deal with upward and downward referrals starting with the need for a higher level of care and / or specialist care required for the patient and then later to facilitate the patients return to the health facility where care was initiated.

Our rural areas are also blessed by the generosity from the Private Sector, Public Sector, Universities, Religious Groups and other NGO's that continue supporting the partnership between the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health and SA Red Cross Air Mercy Service (AMS) which makes it possible to sustain the **Flying Doctor Services**.

This is an outreach programme where doctors sacrifice their family and social time with early morning starts and late returns go out to assist in the outlying facilities. The outreach has evolved to be more structured and involves Teaching Ward Rounds, Specialist Consults, Surgery and other Capacity Building efforts. Just last year more than thirty (30) public hospitals throughout KwaZulu-Natal received specialist services through outreach services with the support of some two hundred and fifty (250) medical practitioners on a monthly basis. Our statistics also show that in the same year more than fifteen-thousand (15 000) patients received specialist services in their local facilities through this Outreach Service. All credit due to the volunteer

specialists in public, private, university, religious groups with no request for payment for skills rendered.

We again wish to thank you for all the support given and we remain open and available for advice and assistance geared to improving the health status of our communities.

I wish you wisdom in your deliberations.