

**SPEECH BY KZN HEALTH MEC, DR SIBONGISENI DHLOMO ON
THE OCCASION OF THE LAUNCH OF MEDICAL ORTHOTICS AND
PROSTHETICS UNIT AT WENTWORTH**

13 November 2014

Programme Director, Mr. Alan Khan

EThekweni Mayor – Cllr James Nxumalo

DUT Vice Chancellor – Professor Bawa

KZN Health Head of Dept. – Dr Sibongile Zungu

Faculty of Health Sciences Head - Professor Puckree

DUT Academics and Staff members

Invited guests, friends and students

Members of the Media,

It gives me a great pleasure today to see a realization of a dream that we announced during our 2012 Budget Speech. For this I want to sincerely thank the Management of this University for your contribution and hard work that have culminated in this project coming to fruition.

Historically, the Department has been faced with a serious shortage of professionals with the expertise to design and craft assistive devices that bring much-needed dignity, self-reliance, independence as well as economic viability to our people who are not able bodied.

Your contribution in this regard is profoundly priceless. It is something that many able bodied people out there do not understand. But we do understand, and that is why we are here to applaud and encourage you to do more.

Historically, in the Republic of South Africa (RSA) only Tshwane University of Technology offered this qualification admitting only 25 students per intake and most of graduates would opt for the private sector.

As a Province, we have been battling to offer appropriate and sufficient service to those in need. Our situation is being further compounded by the fact that Wentworth Orthopedic Centre is the only institution of its kind in this province that is fully functional. Similar Centres at Ladysmith and King Edward had to be closed down due to the lack of personnel. What is worse is that prior to 2012 these centers were manned by personnel ranging between 55 and 60 years of age who have since retired. At the same time, demand for these devices kept growing and the waiting list grew longer.

Therefore what I'm saying is that this Province has suffered from absolute scarcity of these professionals, making the plight of the disabled people to be even worse.

The Department approached the Durban University of Technology (DUT)'s Faculty of Health Science in May 2010 with a view to have DUT offering training of Orthotics and Prosthetics clinicians/ technicians at Wentworth Hospital. DUT expressed interest and support to engage in this project. The department funded the project with a total amount of **R35 million** which was to be paid over the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF).

DUT committed to offer a 4 year degree and Mid-level worker programme on MOP. The first cohort of 30 students who are

Department of Health Bursary holders enrolled for the 4 year degree in August 2013 and the second group registered in January 2014 with 13 students who are DOH bursary holders and 17 private paying students.

Through the partnership we have cemented, today we are able to boldly say that the scarcity of ORTHOTICS/ PROSTHETICS professionals is now a thing of the past! Thanks to this partnership, today we have the opportunity to make a fresh start in our endeavour to change people's lives for the better and meet the demand for these devices.

Again through this partnership, we have established a world class training institution which will not only serve KwaZulu-Natal but the whole country and Africa at large as attested by the total enrolment of **57** students from RSA and **3 from Angola**.

To all those involved, today we are saying; you have made true **Ralf Waldo Emerson's** directive when he said:

"Do not go where the path leads but instead follow uncharted ground and leave a trail"

Our Province is now geared to produce its own Medical Orthotics and Prosthetics graduates right here in DUT in a course packaged to meet international standards.

As a Department we are excited and grateful to be associated with DUT that has been for years recognized as one institution that is very strong in producing professionals who are strong in balancing science, art, theory and practice.

We are thus comfortable in knowing that the students we have here will come out being professionals that we can all be proud of.

We have great hopes that through this initiative we will be able to drastically reduce the waiting time to acquire prosthesis which at present ranges from 6 to 12 months.

Our students here must understand that we will always have a need for their services as their products cater for those in need through hereditary factors; motor vehicle accidents; industrial accidents as well as chemical laboratory factors.

Again, we are proud of this versatile Wentworth training site that will not only be accessed by DUT students but will be open to registrars and nurses studying orthopedics and any other relevant health sciences qualifications.

As a Department, we look forward to a long and fruitful relationship that will see us working together to produce Orthotics and Prosthetics of a caliber that will benefit families, communities and health institutions.

To our students here, firstly we are saying; CONGRATULATIONS for being the first group on this all-important discipline.

Secondly, we are saying the Department of Health has eleven (11) health districts which are spread out geographically. We want you to know that the people with disabilities at present have to follow a hierarchy of steps from local clinics to District Tertiary institutions before finally getting to Wentworth. That is cumbersome as you might imagine.

Our aim here is to revitalize the District-based Orthotics and Prosthetics Clinics. These have to be manned by you upon qualification. Your expertise is especially needed in assessments; diagnosis; measurements and fittings in areas where the people are.

Lastly, we all need to appreciate that solutions that we are planning, working on and implementing are those that must address health in its totality in accordance with the World Health Organization (WHO) definition that says "*Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of diseases or infirmity.*"

Programme Director, we thank all the guests and dignitaries who have traveled far to grace this occasion. To those from outside our Province, through this initiative, we have affirmed what they always hear: KwaZulu-Natal leads and others will follow.

I thank you