

Speech by KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo on the occasion of the commemoration of WORLD MENTAL HEALTH month at UMzinyathi

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Programme Director

Our 2015 theme for World Mental Health Month:

“DIGNITY IN MENTAL HEALTH” AND SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES LIVING WITH MENTAL DISORDERS

Our starting point here is that **there is no health without mental health.**

Mental Health promotion is part of the foundation for spreading a message about dignity in mental health.

It is also an appreciation that good mental health is a valuable asset and that people should think about mental health more broadly and think about ways of supporting it.

What we know today is:

- One in four adults will experience mental health difficulties.
- People with mental health difficulties continue to face challenges in obtaining the help that they require.
- Stigma and discrimination are significant barriers to obtaining good mental health care and to accessing the everyday social activities that keep us mental well.

We have to remember that the stated aim of the Department of Health is to provide accessible, equitable, adequate and appropriate mental health services.

The healthy and mentally well balanced citizens make it easy for us to attain the 4 key outputs identified in the Negotiated Service Delivery Agreement which are:

- Increasing life expectancy
- Decreasing maternal and child mortality (through monitoring of depression ante and post-natally)
- Reducing burden of diseases due to non-communicable diseases that include alcohol and substance use, depression and anxiety
- Combat HIV incidence, manage STI and TB effectively through provision of psycho social support

WHY WE CHOSE UMZINYATHI DISTRICT

- We first wish to focus our attention on the National Health Insurance designated districts, and UMzinyathi District is one of them.
- UMzinyathi District is the first district that has taken initiative to link mental health with healthy lifestyle for employees and health care users in the community.
- Substance abuse rates are high in this District due to vast dagga plantations in 3 sub districts.

- Defaulter and re-admission rates are high and require strengthening of psycho social rehabilitation programmes
- There are also no Regional level services in this District for children; adolescents and adults, hence the need for support to enhance quality of service delivery.

Our take is that, to make dignity in mental health a reality requires of every member of society to work together and make mental health visible, not something to be ashamed of. Assistance is always available in the form of the **Mental Health First Aid Action Plan** which extols us to:

- **A**pproach, assess and assist with any crisis
- **L**isten non-judgementally
- **G**ive support and information
- **E**ncourage appropriate professional help
- **E**ncourage other supports

We are also targeting our employees with the view to reducing the risk of developing mental disorders and disabilities in the workplace and in the community.

Common mental health problems like depression, anxiety, substance use disorder, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder do not need to stop any person from working. With the right support and the right job **people with mental problems perform vital roles in workplaces** across the province

Work place can be sanctuary with those with mental problems because they can and provide identity, friendship, a steady routine and a salary.

Let us not isolate and stigmatize.

We all have to support and encourage all the people to partake in Healthy lifestyle activities

Benefits of Healthy Lifestyle on Employees:

- Improved staff attitudes according to National Core Standards Domains
- Improved productivity
- Lower staff turnover
- Ensuring ethical and legal obligations are met to minimise litigations
- Retention of skills and experience
- Improved health care, treatment and management of the patients

Indeed, Mental Health is more than absence of mental illness: it is vital to individuals, families and societies

Incorporating dignity into an approach to mental health issues is fundamental to dealing with stigma and discrimination.

There is nothing dignified about subjecting people with any illness to stigma, adding to the problems they are already trying to cope with. We

all need to work harder towards changing social attitudes and spreading public awareness of the nature of mental illness.

As healthcare workers we can do a lot to even prevent suicides through:

- Creating more Youth Friendly Clinics
- Fostering Health Promotion in Clinics and Hospitals
- Promoting awareness of acute stress, anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation.
- Training of medical officers on childhood mental disorders.
- Creating clear Referral pathways for children and adolescents with mental health disorders
- Screening of psychosocial problems in school learners through School Health Programme activities
- Improving skills of Primary Health Care nurses to recognise childhood mental disorders
- Ensure facility compliance to Mental Health Care Act 17 Of 2002 prescripts regarding 72 hour assessment

Always remember that equity and fairness for the patients who need services is vital to ensure that services are accessible, acceptable and approachable.

***Symptoms are not a barrier to recovery,
But attitude is...***

I thank you