

REMARKS BY EASTERN CAPE MEC FOR HEALTH, N. Y. CAPA AT THE PEPFAR NURSING LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE IN-PERSON LEARNING COLLABORATIVE ON 5 NOVEMBER 2024

Programme director

BCM Executive Mayor, Hon. Cllr Faku

The U.S President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) Acting Country Coordinator, Ms Johnson-Qureshi

Managers from Global Health Security and Diplomacy US PEPFAR, SA PEPFAR leaders

Delegations from the 7 African countries – Botswana,

Eswatini, Côte d'Ivoire, Malawi, Nigeria, Zambia and Nigeria

The National Department of Health representatives, led by Dr Mahlati

Eastern Cape Department of Health HoD Dr Wagner and your team

Nursing Directors and HAST Managers from four piloting provinces: The Eastern Cape, the Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and the North West

Supporting partners

Organisers of this prestigious event

Ladies and gentlemen

Good evening

It is an honour and privilege to be addressing you this evening. As the backbone of the health sector, nurses play a key role in the delivery of quality services to millions of people on a daily basis. The Eastern Cape provincial leadership appreciates PEPFAR SA for choosing Eastern Cape Province as a host of this event. We highly appreciate the support from PEPFAR USA for funding nurse-led projects across the selected countries.

I have been informed that our country is looking at development of nurse leaders that will strengthen clinical governance whilst retaining the benefits gained from HIV management.

As a country we believe that nurses are the backbone and the core group of the health system. Therefore, empowering this group of health professionals will restore the reputation of the health system, increase opportunities of achieving health priorities and improve patient outcomes.

All levels of care including nursing colleges need the kind of nursing leadership that will instil a sense of responsibility and accountability. The country is inundated with increasing serious adverse events that lead to litigations, a challenge that impact negatively on our budget. This leadership initiative is expected to empower nurse leaders to also address this challenging situation of our country and reduce these serious adverse events.

We are happy that this year's learning collaborative is focused on building a strong and resilient nursing workforce equipped with the leadership and technical skills to lead national HIV responses and ensure the sustainability of healthcare systems. Over the coming days, nurses from all the participating countries will be sharing best practises. This can only improve our health sector.

This project finds us at the time when we were planning to roll out training of primary healthcare nurse managers. We appreciate the selection of the Eastern cape for this pilot as it will give us an opportunity to share and learn best practices from other African countries who will be piloting with us.

This is also an opportunity for inter country collaboration that will benefit both nursing education and practice. South Africa is currently seeing an increase in adverse events that lead to litigations. Empowering these nurses with leadership skills will hopefully empower them to address these challenges.

We must explore how best can we elevate the role of our nurses in leading the HIV response. This is the perfect opportunity for us to discuss what has worked for our respective countries. This is the perfect platform to share best practises and highlight the important role that is played by our nurses.

Many doctors will tell you that when they started out, they were showed the ropes by nurses. Their unwavering commitment to patient care, often under challenging circumstances, is nothing short of heroic. From urban hospitals to rural clinics, nurses ensure that every South African receives the medical attention they need, often going above and beyond the call of duty. I am sure it is the same in Botswana, Eswatini, Côte d'Ivoire, Malawi, Nigeria, Zambia and Nigeria.

South Africa has always produced quality nurses who are not only good healthcare professionals, but are also leaders of society. We stand on the shoulders of giants like Cecilia Makiwane, the first registered black professional nurse in South Africa, Dora Nginza, Albertina Sisulu and Kholeka Tunyiswa, who were all great nurses and anti-apartheid activists. These are some of the nurses who paved the way so that we can today be closer to achieving universal health coverage through the implementation of the National Health Insurance.

Ladies and gentlemen, just like we did on May 29, the people of the USA are voting for their next president. It has been an interesting election period between former President



Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris. Whatever happens, whoever is elected as the next president, we are confident that will not change the good relationship that our countries have enjoyed. May the will of the people prevail at these elections.

The U.S government has, for years, put its money where its mouth is and supported us. The more than **R107-billion** that the US government has invested in our country since 2004 to help us manage TB and HIV/AIDS — was money well spent. The U.S government worked hand-in-hand with our government when HIV/AIDS was still seen as a death sentence. Today, because of such partnerships, our people are living longer and healthier lives.

Our government has made ARVs easily available at no cost to those who need the life-saving treatment. We have also embarked on awareness campaigns to encourage people to use condoms whenever they are intimate with their partners because prevention is always better than cure. The cascade achievements in 2023/24 financial year against the 95:95:95 targets for HIV and AIDS was 93: 81: 84.

This shows that we are on the right track but we need to improve on the second and third 95. We continue testing people for HIV so that people can know their status, be on treatment if they are found to be HIV positive. For this current financial year, we have already tested over **1.1-million** people in the province. So many people are getting tested today compared to a couple of years ago. HIV/AIDS is no longer seen as a death sentence. People are living longer and healthy lives.

Through the partnership with PEPFAR, we have implemented a number of innovations. We are proud at being the first province to launch the Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U) campaign in the country. Taking from our tune, the national government through the South African National AIDS Council, also launched their campaign. The U=U campaign encourages adherence to treatment so that an HIV positive patient who is virally suppressed does not transmit HIV to an HIV negative partner and will also not infect a child during delivery and breast feeding.

One of the things that might threaten the good work that has been done to stop the spread of HIV is the high rate of teenage pregnancy, particularly the 10-14 years' cohort which accounts for **3%** of adolescent and teenage pregnancy. This shows that despite all the sexual reproductive education and awareness campaigns, our children are having unprotected sex. This exposes them not only to unwanted pregnancies, but to sexually transmitted illnesses like HIV.

We will not stop educating girls and boys about the dangers of unprotected sex. The department has also established **513** youth zones across the province where the youth go to get services in designated areas for them. While we want sexually active people to use condoms, we also promote the use of age-appropriate contraceptives.

Another important programme is pre-exposure prophylaxis, which is the taking of antiretroviral treatment by an HIV negative partner to protect themselves from a positive Partner. These partners are still advised to use a condom. HIV positive people are in loving



relationships with HIV negative people and have had children together because of the great strides that we have made in the fight against HIV.

President Nelson Mandela, who was one of our activists against HIV/AIDS once said: **“Let us give publicity to HIV/ AIDS and not hide it, because the only way to make it appear like a normal illness like TB, like cancer, is always to come out and say somebody has died because of HIV.”** Today, people feel free to disclose their status which helps to raise awareness.

Because of that, we won the war against stigmatization and now we will win the war against HIV/AIDS. If we can all work together, we will end it as a public health threat by 2030. We must raise awareness and educate our people, especially children so that they will not have unprotected sex.

Our government has made condoms available free of charge. In the Eastern Cape, we distributed **54, 768, 760** male condoms and **1, 111, 200** female condoms respectively during the 2023/24 financial year.

Programme director, we are grateful for the partnership that we have had with PEPFAR. This relationship has evolved from a doctor-led programme to the current nurse-led programme, ensuring access to ante retroviral treatment to **624 365** people in the province. We are grateful for the support because without the generosity of PEPFAR, CDC, and USAID, we would not be able to achieve the milestones that we have and deliver quality health care services to our people.

Our NGOs have played a crucial role in the delivery of health services to the people of the Eastern Cape, especially in hinterlands. MatCH, Right 2 Care and TB/HIV Care Association have been godsend. Without the support from the U.S government, they would not be able to assist us.

Enkosi.

The Eastern Cape, being a rural province means some patients sometimes have to travel long distances to access services. But the province has a strong programme of Central Chronic Medicine Dispensing and Distribution (CCMDD), which ensures delivery of medication in pick-up points nearer the patient's home.

PEPFAR funded partners are working with traditional leaders who have opened up their facilities for accreditation for this programme. Even those that pick up treatment at a health facility, they do so through a fast lane and thus do not overburden our health system.

In conclusion, while our nurses go through continuous professional development sessions through our Funda Friday, which are one hour Friday morning online learning sessions, it is important that we equip them with appropriate leadership skills. The Eastern Cape continues to invest in the training of nurses through the Lilitha College of Nursing and other universities.

I wish you well as you discuss and share best practices for the continent. Enjoy the beautiful sea view and scenery of the Eastern Cape, South Africa. The festive season is



just around the corner. Some of you have already applied for leave so that you can spend time with your loved ones over the festive season.

We have some of the best beaches and **800km** of unspoilt coastline so I encourage you to come back with your families to explore the Eastern Cape. We have so much more to offer so please come back.

I thank you.

