

MEDIA STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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EASTERN CAPE HEALTH DEPARTMENT MARKS WORLD SIGHT DAY WITH CATARACT SURGERY BLITZ AT FRONTIER REGIONAL HOSPITAL'S SABONA EYE CENTRE.

The Eastern Cape Department of Health, led by MEC Ntandokazi Capa, in partnership with the Al-Imdaad Foundation, Frontier Regional Hospital staff, and dedicated social partners, successfully launched a Cataract Surgery Blitz at the Sabona Eye Centre in Queenstown to mark World Sight Day and Eye Care Awareness Month. The Blitz, which takes place from 2 to 5 October, aims to restore the vision of more than 100 patients through life-changing cataract operations.

Already, 22 patients have successfully undergone surgery, with three ophthalmologists, 14 nurses, three general assistants, and support teams working tirelessly to make this vision-restoring campaign a success. The surgical programme is led by Head Ophthalmologist Dr G.M. Tuswa, supported by Dr Dayimani from Mthatha, ophthalmic-trained nurses from surrounding districts, and additional theatre staff.

The Blitz is primarily focused on patients with age-related cataracts, but it also aims to raise awareness about the connection between cataracts and diabetes mellitus. Dr Tuswa explained that while cataract surgery restores sight, uncontrolled diabetes can still cause eye complications later in life. He said:

“As eye health professionals, we see every day how cataracts rob people of their independence, especially the elderly. Surgery restores patients' vision, dignity, and ability to live full lives. But we cannot ignore the role of diabetes. Poorly controlled diabetes can damage the eyes even after successful surgery, sometimes within months. This is why we continue to emphasise the importance of good nutrition, regular exercise, and adhering to treatment plans. Eye health is not just about treating disease when it appears; it is about prevention, education, and healthy living.”

Speaking at the launch, Eastern Cape Health MEC, Hon. Ntandokazi Capa, praised the collaborative spirit of the initiative:

“This Blitz is about more than just operations; it is about dignity, hope, and restoring the most precious gift — the gift of sight. For many of these patients, this surgery will change their lives forever. I would like to thank the ophthalmologists, the nurses, the staff at Frontier Regional Hospital, our partners from the Al-Imdaad Foundation, and every person who has contributed to making this possible. This demonstrates what can be achieved when government, civil society, and health professionals collaborate. This is only the beginning. Working with our partners, we will continue to roll out more blitzes across the province so that no one is left behind.”

The Al-Imdaad Foundation echoed this sentiment, highlighting the importance of partnerships in healthcare delivery:

“For us, supporting this Blitz is about being part of a story of hope. We are humbled to walk alongside the Department of Health and the dedicated medical teams who are bringing light back into people’s lives. Our mission has always been to uplift vulnerable communities, and what better way to do so than by helping to restore the gift of sight? When a grandmother can once again see her grandchildren, when a breadwinner can return to work, when a patient regains independence — these are the changes that ripple through families and communities. That is why we are proud to be part of this initiative.”

Aftercare and Awareness:

Post-operative care is essential for success. Patients are advised to avoid rubbing their eyes, engaging in strenuous activity, and to follow the prescribed eye drop regimen as directed. Follow-up visits are scheduled for Day 1, one week after, and one month after.

This Blitz also forms part of Eye Care Awareness Month (late September – mid-October), which promotes regular eye examinations, community engagement, and awareness of preventable causes of blindness, such as cataracts, glaucoma, and diabetes. It culminates with World Sight Day, observed globally on 9 October under this year’s theme: “Love Your Eyes.”

Looking Ahead:

The Department of Health remains committed to scaling up cataract surgery blitzes across the province and implementing measures to address the backlog of patients awaiting treatment. MEC

Capa has affirmed that part of this effort will include strengthening capacity by ensuring that more skilled staff are deployed and supported to meet the demand for cataract surgeries.

“This is only the beginning. Working with our partners, we will not only roll out more blitzes but also build the necessary capacity to clear backlogs and ensure that every person in the Eastern Cape has access to quality eye care,” MEC Capa said.

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