

ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR HEALTH AND WELLNESS, Ms NOMANTU NKOMO-RALEHOKO DURING THE WORLD CANCER COMMEMORATION DAY HELD AT THE LAUDIUM CIVIC CENTRE, LAUDIUM, TSHWANE ON THE 06 FEBRUARY 2024

Programme Director, Mr Bongani Bingwa

Chairperson of PinkDrive NPC Talk, Mr Bongumusa Makhathini

The Minister of Health in RSA: Dr Joe Phaahla

Austrian Embassy, Deputy Ambassador, Mr Oliver Gruenbacher

Embassy of Japan (in the Republic of South Africa) representative,

Cllr Naeem Patel

Mrs Noelene Kotschan

Invited guests

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good day.

Today, we come together to observe World Cancer Commemoration Day, I am profoundly grateful and honoured to address a gathering enriched with esteemed community leaders, dedicated cancer activists, healthcare experts, and various integral partners. Your participation in today's event is not just a mere presence; it is a powerful symbol of your commitment and a source of motivation for all those involved in the fight against cancer. The collective expertise and relentless dedication represented here are crucial in our shared quest to conquer this formidable disease.

The theme, "Closing the Gap in Cancer Care," is a poignant reflection of our collective mission and the challenges we face in the journey towards eradicating cancer. This theme is a clarion call to address the disparities in cancer care, advocating for equitable access to prevention, early detection, effective treatment, and comprehensive care for everyone, regardless of their location, economic status, or cultural background. It is about democratizing the fight against cancer and ensuring that no one is left behind.

Exploring the depths of "Closing the Gap in Cancer Care," we recognize the complexity of this challenge. It involves improving healthcare infrastructure, making cancer treatments more affordable, enhancing access to early detection and screening, and providing all-encompassing support to patients and their families. Our aim is to bridge these critical gaps, making sure that the strides we make in cancer care are shared and beneficial to all segments of society.

On this World Cancer Day, let us reaffirm our dedication to this crucial cause. It is a day to forge stronger collaborations, to innovate, educate, and advocate for all-encompassing cancer care policies that are both inclusive and impactful.

Honourable Minister,

Our department's firm commitment to enhancing the accessibility and quality of cancer screening and treatment services across the province is a testament to our dedication to public health and welfare. This commitment, deeply rooted in our mission to save lives and improve health outcomes, reflects our resolve to confront one of the most challenging health crises of our time. Through focusing on both prevention and treatment, we aim to create a comprehensive healthcare environment that is responsive to the needs of all citizens.

In collaboration with partners like the Pink-Drive and other key stakeholders in both the public and private sectors, we have successfully expanded our service reach. This expansion, crucial in bridging the existing gaps in cancer prevention and care, ensures that more individuals have access to vital health services. The synergy created through these partnerships has not only broadened our capabilities but also enriched our understanding and approach to cancer care.

A major focus of our efforts has been the significant improvement in the availability of cancer screening programs, particularly for breast cancer. Early detection is a critical component in the fight against cancer, and by increasing access to these services, we are actively working to diagnose cancer at stages where it is most treatable.

This proactive approach is not only life-saving but also reduces the long-term burden on our healthcare system. The expansion of these programs is a clear indication of our commitment to proactive healthcare management and our dedication to the well-being of our citizens.

Additionally, we have made considerable strides in enhancing cancer treatment services. By integrating the latest medical advancements and therapies, and ensuring they are accessible to a broader segment of the population, we are not just treating cancer but also improving the quality of life for patients and their families. This holistic approach to cancer care is a crucial step towards ensuring that our healthcare services are not only advanced but also compassionate and patient-centered.

So, in our ongoing battle against breast cancer, I want to stress the importance of regular Breast Self-Examinations for all women. This simple practice is crucial for early detection, which can significantly increase the chances of successful treatment. In our province, we are proud to have 10 hospitals equipped with mammogram services, and we're expanding this initiative by adding mammogram outreach services to 15 more hospitals. This effort, in collaboration with Pink Drive, is a crucial part of our strategy to improve breast cancer prevention, with our campaigns set to start on the 8th of February 2024.

For cervical cancer prevention, our focus is on promoting the HPV vaccination for girls aged 9-15 years. We have embraced the latest advancements by transitioning to Liquid-Based Cytology (LBC) for cervical cancer screening, and we're gearing up to

implement HPV screening across the province. This proactive approach is a significant leap forward in our preventive efforts against cervical cancer.

In the area of cervical cancer management and control, our Department has partnered with the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI) to enhance access to treatments for precancerous cervical conditions. This collaboration has led to the donation of 25 LLETZ machines and 7 Colposcopy machines to various health facilities. Consequently, we now have 23 hospitals equipped with LLETZ services, 21 offering Colposcopy, 6 providing Chemotherapy, and 5 capable of administering Radiotherapy.

This expansion of services is more than just a numerical increase; it represents a vital enhancement in the quality of healthcare and the potential for improved outcomes for women facing cervical cancer. By broadening access to these essential services, we are making significant strides in reducing the impact of cervical cancer in our province.

Reflecting on the journey we have embarked upon is crucial. This journey, characterized by both challenges and triumphs, stands as a testament to the power of collaboration and a shared vision. The strides we have made in the field of cancer care are not merely milestones in healthcare advancement; they represent hope for countless individuals and families affected by this disease. The progress we have achieved together serves as a poignant reminder of what is possible when we come together for a common cause.

My heartfelt appreciation goes out to Pink Drive and all our partners, including the many dedicated NGOs, for their commitment to this mission. Their steadfast support and collaborative efforts have been vital in expanding and enhancing the cancer care services we offer across our province.

Their involvement goes beyond just supporting a cause; it is a demonstration of humanity and compassion. Each organization, volunteer, and supporter brings unique strengths and perspectives, collectively contributing to a comprehensive approach to cancer care.

Their relentless dedication and diverse contributions are paving the way toward a future where effective cancer prevention, early detection, and treatment are accessible to everyone. This collaborative effort is nurturing a community that is not only healthier but also stronger and more resilient, ready to face the challenges of cancer with a united front and renewed hope.

The importance of early detection in the fight against cancer cannot be overstated. Early detection significantly increases the chances of successful treatment and survival. It is a critical component of our healthcare strategy, and we continuously strive to raise awareness and facilitate access to screening and diagnostic services.

By detecting cancer at an earlier stage, we can intervene more effectively, offering patients a better prognosis and a higher quality of life. This focus on early detection is a key aspect of our commitment to reducing the impact of cancer in our community.

I also wish to highlight the essential role played by our broader community in this undertaking. The engagement, awareness, and support shown by every community member are important in strengthening our collective efforts.

Each individual's contribution, whether through staying informed, participating in awareness programs, or offering support to those affected by cancer, is invaluable. Active participation in preventive practices, such as regular screenings and vaccinations, is equally important. In this united spirit of compassion and cooperation, we are building a more health-conscious society, poised to meet and overcome the challenges of cancer with unity and optimism.

Thank you very much.