

REMARKS BY GAUTENG MEC FOR HEALTH AND WELLNESS, Ms NOMANTU NKOMO-RALEHOKO AT THE WELCOME CEREMONY OF MEDICAL INTERNS AND COMMUNITY SERVICE PROFESSIONALS

THURSDAY, 25 APRIL 2024

Programme Director,
Acting Head of Department, Mr Lesiba Malotana;
Senior Managers of Gauteng Department of Health;
Medical interns and community service professionals;
Colleagues and stakeholders in our midst;

Good afternoon, Sanibonani, Dumelang, Ndi ma-sia-ri!

I stand before you with excitement as we welcome you to the Gauteng Department of Health. We are fortunate that 2 356 medical interns and community service professionals have heeded the call to come serve the residents of Gauteng.

We have in our midst Medical Doctors, Pharmacists, Clinical Psychologists, Clinical Psychologists, Dieticians, Dentists, Environmental Health, Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists, Speech and Hearing Therapists, Diagnostic Radiographers and Nurses.

Your presence here signifies the beginning of a journey, one that will shape not only your careers but also the lives of countless individuals who rely on our public healthcare system.

I want to take this opportunity to warmly welcome you to the department as you join our hard-working healthcare workforce to serve our communities with warmth, compassion, and empathy.

Programme Director, it is important to acknowledge that the complexity of the healthcare system often comes with challenges more especially the public health system due to a number of factors.

In Gauteng, we service a growing population which means that our public health system is already feeling the strain of the increasing demand for health services. We have been privileged that some of the country's specialised top clinicians and healthcare professionals have chosen us as the employer of choice. They have committed themselves to the cause to serve our community with diligence, integrity, and high level of professionalism.

These esteemed professionals have chosen to join our ranks, bringing with them a wealth of knowledge, experience, and expertise. As interns and commserve employees, you will have the opportunity to learn from these exceptional healthcare workers, and you will gain invaluable insights and mentorship that will shape your careers. Your placement in our health facilities is crucial for the healthcare system in Gauteng and I have no doubt that you will contribute to ensure that the provision of

comprehensive and specialised care meet the increasing demands of the province's population.

Programme Director, as Gauteng Department of Health, we have historically been regarded as the jewel of public healthcare in the country. A recognition we don't take lightly. However, due to some of the challenges we have experienced in the past we lost that status. This resulted in a decline in the public trust. I am happy that you come in at a time when the tide has turned. This is due to a number of interventions we embarked upon as the 6th Administration.

While it is important to acknowledge that the complexity of the health system presents challenges, it is equally important to note that within these challenges there are ample opportunities for growth and innovation. As Gauteng Health, our vision is clear - improving the experience of care for every patient who enters our healthcare system is the ultimate goal.

As the department, we understand the frustrations caused by long queues, poor infrastructure and financial constraints among others. We recognise that these challenges can take a toll on the morale of both patients and healthcare workers. But it is precisely in the face of these challenges that we have found the strength to rise above and serve with compassion.

We have taken extreme and rigorous measures to address these concerns and we are on track to reclaim our position as the face of public health in the country. I can assure you that you are coming into a system that is on a path of transformation, professionalisation and innovation. We are noticing the change in the public perception. The feedback we are getting from people accessing our services of is now more positive. There are more healthcare workers who prefer to work in Gauteng. This is a clear indication that our hard work to reposition Gauteng Health is bearing fruits.

Our turnaround strategy has enabled us to address the service delivery bottlenecks within our system. We have implemented interventions to improve our financial management systems which has enabled us to reprioritise the funds towards improving our health facilities and expanding our footprint to meet the needs growing communities.

One of the key challenges we have recognised is the need for modern and well-equipped infrastructure. We understand that in order to provide the best possible care, we must ensure that our healthcare facilities are conducive to healing and recovery.

I am proud to mention that we have made progress in upgrading our infrastructure, including the renovation and construction of state-of-the-art healthcare facilities throughout Gauteng. These improvements have been made to create a work environment that is safe, efficient, and supportive of your professional growth.

We are rolling out the I Serve With A Smile campaign across our facilities to bolster staff morale and ultimately reduce patients dissatisfactions and complaints. It is a movement that seek to infuse our healthcare system with warmth, compassion, and a renewed commitment to the public service. This initiative is aimed at improving the

patient experience of care and restore the once-renowned reputation of our healthcare system.

At Gauteng Health, we believe that by fostering a culture of empathy, respect, and compassion, we can transform the patient experience and restore public trust in our healthcare system. I want to encourage you all to join the movement to create a culture of empathy and compassion that permeates every aspect of our healthcare delivery. As healthcare workers and employees of the Gauteng Department of Health, we bear the responsibility to create an environment where patients feel valued, respected, and supported whenever they visit our facilities.

Programme Director, it is important to mention that we have heeded the call by the Premier Lesufi to take advantage of technology to improve our service delivery efforts. We understand that technology plays a vital role in improving patient care and streamlining processes for efficient health delivery. To that end, we have made significant strides in rolling out technology initiatives within our healthcare facilities.

We have rolled out the Health Information System (HIS) in our hospitals to improve patient administration, file management and the process of referrals. I am proud to say that the one-patient-one-file is no longer a dream but has become a reality. As young healthcare professionals, I expect you to champion this initiative and share your innovative ideas with us so that we can fully harness the power of technology.

As you embark on your internships and community service, I want to encourage you to pledge to make a difference in the lives of patients. Take the time to listen to their concerns, offer a comforting word, and provide the best care possible. Your passion, skills, and commitment have the power to transform lives and restore faith in our healthcare system.

Let us embrace the challenges that lie ahead with determination and compassion. Through our collective efforts, we can create a healthcare system that is characterised by excellence, empathy, and patient-centered care. Together, we can make a lasting impact on the well-being of our community and inspire others to join us in this noble cause.

The journey to a healthy society starts with a more humane healthcare system that treats its patients with warmth, compassion, and empathy. We don't just heal the body but we mend souls.

Can you be the generation whose pursuit of this profession will be more than a career path but a response to a higher calling to restore dignity and hope to those in need of healthcare service?

With these few words, I extend my warmest welcome to each one of you. May your journey with the Gauteng Department of Health be filled with growth, learning, and a sense of purpose. Together, let us serve with a smile and make a difference in the lives of those we are privileged to care for. I wish you a rewarding and impactful experience ahead.

I thank you.