



GAUTENG PROVINCE

HEALTH
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

SPEECH

ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR HEALTH AND WELLNESS, MS. NOMANTU NKOMO-RALEHOKO, AT THE PALLIATIVE CARE SYMPOSIUM HELD AT CHRIS HANI BARAGWANATH ACADEMIC HOSPITAL

FRIDAY, 22 NOVEMBER 2024

Programme Director;
National Department of Health representative; US Embassy Representative; WHO Representative; Head of Clinical School Medicine (Wits); University representatives; BMSF Foundation; Global Cancer Disparities Africa; Acting CEO Dr Mqhayi-Mbambo; Healthcare Professionals; Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good morning.

It is both an honour and a privilege to address you today at this significant gathering, the Palliative Care Symposium. This event marks an important moment as we commemorate 25 years of dedicated service by the Wits/Gauteng Centre of Excellence for Palliative Care and reflect on a decade since the adoption of the World Health Assembly's Resolution 67.19, which emphasises the integration of palliative care into national health systems.

Palliative care is a fundamental human right, essential for improving the quality of life for patients and families facing life-threatening illnesses. In Gauteng, we have made commendable strides in this regard. The Wits/Gauteng Centre of Excellence for Palliative Care has been at the forefront, providing holistic care that addresses the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs of our communities.



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Over the past 25 years, the Centre has:

- Delivered comprehensive palliative care services to diverse communities in Johannesburg.
- Trained healthcare professionals at various levels, including undergraduate, postgraduate, and in-service training, thereby enhancing the capacity of our healthcare system.
- Re-established palliative care units at Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital and the Soweto Comprehensive Cancer Centre, ensuring that specialised care is accessible to those in need.
- Fostered partnerships with faith-based organisations, hospices, and academic institutions, creating a collaborative network dedicated to advancing palliative care.

These achievements are a testament to what can be accomplished when dedication meets collaboration.

In our continuous effort to enhance patient care, the Gauteng Department of Health provincially launched the 'I Serve with a Smile' campaign in November 2023. This initiative aims to improve patient experience by fostering empathy, compassion, and positive service attitudes among healthcare workers. By encouraging every healthcare worker to approach their duties with a smile, enthusiasm, and empathy, we strive to create a more welcoming and supportive environment for our patients.

The campaign aligns seamlessly with the principles of palliative care, which emphasises holistic support addressing not only physical symptoms but also the emotional and psychological well-being of patients and their families. By serving with a smile, we reinforce the dignity and comfort that are central to palliative care.

While we celebrate these milestones, we must acknowledge the challenges that persist. Globally, only 14% of individuals who require palliative care receive it, and in South Africa, 45% of those who die needed palliative care. In Gauteng, access remains unequal, particularly in rural and underserved areas.



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To address these disparities, our department is committed to:

Expanding Access: We will integrate palliative care into primary healthcare systems to ensure that patients can receive care in their homes and communities, thereby bringing services closer to the people.

Training Healthcare Professionals: We will invest in building the capacity of our healthcare workers, ensuring they are equipped to deliver compassionate, person-centered care that meets the diverse needs of our population.

Allocating Resources: Recognising that integration requires funding, we are developing a provincial palliative care implementation plan to ensure that financial resources align with our ambitions and the needs of our communities.

Palliative care is not merely about managing pain, it is about preserving dignity, offering comfort, and ensuring that no one faces illness or end-of-life challenges alone.

Ladies and Gentlemen, today serves as a reminder of what is possible when we work together. Behind every statistic is a human story—a patient whose suffering was alleviated, a family who found solace in compassionate care, and a healthcare professional who went above and beyond to make a difference.

To the pioneers we honour today, I extend my deepest gratitude. Your dedication has laid a strong foundation for the future. To the healthcare workers, researchers, and spiritual leaders present, I urge you to continue being agents of hope and healing.

Let us leave here united in our resolve to make palliative care a cornerstone of our health system. Let us ensure that every patient, regardless of their background or condition, receives care that upholds their dignity and humanity.

I express my heartfelt appreciation to the Wits/Gauteng Centre for Palliative Care and all its partners for their unwavering commitment to advancing palliative care in Gauteng. Your efforts have shown us that collaboration and compassion can transform lives.

As we look to the future, let us remain guided by the principles of equity, quality, and holistic care. Together, we can build a health system where no patient suffers in silence and every family feels supported.

Thank you, and may this symposium inspire us to achieve even greater heights in palliative care.