

# MEC OF HEALTH IN MPUMALANGA PROVINCE, Ms SASEKANI MANZINI'S ADDRESS ON THE LAUNCH OF THE AMBULANCES, FORENSIC VEHICLES AND MEC'S HOTLINE .

22 October, 2019

Program Director,

Head of Department Dr Savera Mohangi,

Executive Management of the Department,

Departmental officials

Ladies and gentlemen,

Members of the media,

Good morning

Programme Director, the right to health which our forefathers and mothers have fought and compromised their lives for. These basic human rights was first outlined in the Freedom Charter and later on in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa's Bill of Right.

The Freedom Charter's vision on health was that: "A preventive health scheme shall be run by the state. Free medical care and hospitalisation shall be provided for all, with special care for mothers and young children. On the other hand the Constitution of the country says this about health: Everyone has a right to access to healthcare services, including reproductive health. The ANC government is indeed delivering on the mandate given by the people. The NHI will provide **access to quality health**

**services** for all South Africans based on their health needs and irrespective of their socio-economic status.

The NHI bill is out for public comment. I have spent the last few weeks empowering our people on the NHI and the NHI Bill so that they can interact with the National portfolio committee during the public hearings in the province from 25-28 October 2019

Today I come here as a servant and representative of the people's Government as led by our Hon President; Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa and the Hon Premier in our Province Umama Refilwe Mtshweni-Tsipane . I am here today as per the announcement I made during my 2019/2020 policy and budget speech early this year that we will procure 35 ambulances and we will establish a hotline in the office of the MEC.

We are launching this fleet after the official launch of EMS Day by the Minister of Health on the 17th of October. The 17 of October every year will now be part of the Departmental calendar where we will celebrate the work done by EMS officials and the impact it has on the lives of our citizens. The Minister also officially launched the new toll free number 112 which is replacing 10177. So wherever you are calling from you will be automatically redirected to nearest EMS call centre. It gives me great pleasure to be official handing over the 35 ambulances, 15 forensic vehicles and launching the MEC's hotline. The Emergency Medical Services (EMS) is one of the three core pillars of health service delivery, standing as it does alongside primary health care (PHC) and hospital services.

We are also today handing over 15 pick-up bakkies for the Forensic Pathology Services which offers 24 hours services in 21 facilities across the province. There are six (6) facilities in

Nkangala District, six (6) in Ehlanzeni and nine (9) in Gert Sibande district of forensic pathology services. These 15 pick-up bakkies will improve the availability of vehicles to this very sensitive and important service, five (5) bakkies will be allocated per district.

EMS is also a crucial component in the attainment of the core outcome of our government which is to ensure “a long and healthy life for all South Africans”. This outcome is measured in four specific areas which are:

Improving life expectancy, Improving mother and child health and survival, reducing the impact of HIV/AIDS and TB, and Improving health system effectiveness.

It should be noted that over 84% of our people rely on our public healthcare facilities for their good health and we have a responsibility to ensure that our people receive quality healthcare. We are today gearing up towards NHI, the 35 brand new ambulances and the 15 pick-up bakkies that we are unveiling today will improve our ability to come to the aid of the people in emergency situations within a reasonable time including far-flung areas where the terrain is rough.

Program director it is a sad situation where an ambulance is dispatched, only to break down along the road. We want to say to the people of Mpumalanga that this fleet is here to assist you. We want to reduce the challenges raised by communities that they call for ambulances and they do not arrive at all or arrive late. We also want to make sure that as a department we respond on time when called to a scene where there is fatal accident or incident, that requires both Ambulances and Forensic Pathology Services.

When it comes to our ability to respond to incidents of violence, injuries and trauma as a Department our paramedics play a profoundly critical role. They are usually the first healthcare professionals to arrive at the scene of an accident or a homestead of a sick patient and quickly assess the situation and determine the proper course of action for that individual. So it is important that our ambulances are in good working condition and there are enough to respond to the volume of calls we receive, it is crucial for paramedics to get to the scene of an emergency as soon as possible, because this critical to the success of treatment towards saving life.

Due to the vastness of our province and the rough terrain of some of our roads, our ambulances accumulate high mileage very quickly, which means that they are subject to extraordinary wear and tear, and reach their sell-by date very quickly. They then need constant repairs and in some cases replacement. And replacing them does not come cheap, we are sometimes forced to soldier on and continue using them even when they have reached that replacement threshold.

But we are pleased that today we are handing over 35 ambulances, which are fully equipped to an Intermediate Life Support level, and we are in line with the new EMS regulations. These ambulances will be distributed throughout the province to complement the existing operational fleet we have. We see this as a strategic intervention to enhance the working environment of this section of our department which is characterised by emergency and urgency.

It is also a function of our EMS component to provide medical care to patients while they are being transported to a healthcare facility.

Ambulances are therefore basically a Mobile Emergency Clinic whose personnel are trained to drive it; resuscitate and/or stabilise a patient using sophisticated techniques, equipment and drugs. Everything is done to ensure that the patient maintains his or her condition of stability during the ambulance ride.

. We have a responsibility to our communities to always offer a high level of pre-hospital care by skilled and dedicated ambulance staff. I therefore wish to emphasise that the 35 ambulances that we are handing over are not the solution to our EMS challenges we will certainly be adding significantly to these in the future.

We have begun the work of overhauling the health care system in earnest as we prepare for the implementation of NHI bill. Emergency medical service, being at the coalface of health care delivery, has not been left behind. EMS is most often the first point of contact into the health care system and it is therefore critical that the systems we put in place within EMS render efficiency in the pathway to care within NHI.

One of the main tenets of NHI, in its pursuit of Universal Health Coverage, is that of equitable access to Health Care. For many of our people, without EMS they would be unable to access health care at all as it serves as a mode of transportation between health facilities and homestead and not just an ambulatory medical service. So we appreciate the critical role EMS has already been playing in bringing health care closer to the people.

Our EMS practitioners are better empowered and capacitated to manage conditions right at the touch point and to be able to

relay more and more information back to the referral centres before their expected time of arrival.

Most importantly, there are changes envisioned for EMS to align with the provisions of NHI- this means shortened response times adhering to international norms and standards, kind and compassionate staff attitude in line with quality health care delivery, access to health care based on need and no-one being turned away or left behind when they need health care.

We therefore wish to make a strong appeal to our citizens to own and safeguard this property made available to assist those requiring emergency medical care, because these ambulances are not “Government property” they belong to the public. It is therefore up to each and every one of us to alert law enforcement authorities when we witness unsavoury incidents involving EMS vehicles; whether it is paramedics abusing these vehicles; or when we become aware of any plans to damage, hijack or vandalise these vehicles. So, we are relying on you to safeguard this property, which is made available to assist those requiring emergency medical care during their time of need. It is only when that happens that we can successfully deliver on our noble mandate of delivering "a long and healthy life for all".

Forensic medical services was handed over to the Department of Health from SAPS in April 2006 and I will be the first to admit that it has not received the attention it deserves. The forensic officers work under very difficult and emotional circumstances that many of us cannot imagine. I believe it takes a very special, strong person to be a forensic officer.

I am aware that due to financial constraints, the Dept had not allocated a budget for debriefing. I have instructed the HOD to

look into the budget and ensure that there is some allocation reprioritised to do debriefing this year and to ensure that it is prioritised every financial year because both EMS and Forensic officers need regular debriefing based on the nature of the service they provide.

Program Director we are also officially launching the MEC's hotline with the aim to encourage an all-round improvement in our department and to implant a culture of putting the people first as outlined in the Batho Pelebe principle, this will be help in creating an interactive, accessible and responsive department. The importance of a department that is responsive, interactive and effective is that it will deliver services to the people in accordance with the people's mandate. The hotline will provide a mechanism to support the department to achieve its objectives, by enabling the people of Mpumalanga to report unresolved service delivery problems.

The principle that will guide Hotline is that every caller should be listened to and their issue should be recorded and resolved if possible. In addition to the primary function of resolving problems, the Hotline will provide valuable monitoring data and insights into the concerns of our people and the information collected will be used to improve service delivery in our health facilities. The Hotline will improve the satisfaction of our patients in our hospitals and clinics by allowing them to raise their concerns about the service they are receiving from our department at large.

The MEC's Hotline strives to be a model for responsive and accountable complaints systems. Members of the public will be able to lodge their queries by dialing the toll-free hotline number which is **0800 11 11 51**, we will then give a response to the

complaint within a reasonable time. The Hotline will also be used for complimenting good services rendered by our employees so that we can be able to work harder towards the right direction.

We want to also request the public to report any bad behavior by our personnel. We receive a lot of complaints from the public relating to abuse of vehicles and we would like to urge the public to continue reporting such acts.

I want to also call on the public to refrain from making false calls to EMS, there are situations where an ambulance is called only to find that it was a false call. You must know that these acts are wrong because by making such a call, you are actually compromising another person who could have benefited at the time.

We believe that with this allocation of fleet, both EMS and forensic and the MEC's Hotline, our people's health status will be further enhanced to the better.

I thank you