

Launch of 50% ARV Services Celebrations

22 November 2011

Speech by the Executive Mayor of Johannesburg, Councillor Mpho Parks Tau, on the occasion of the official launch of 50% ARV Services Celebrations, Weilers Farm Clinic, Orange Farm – Johannesburg

Programme Director

MMC for Health and Social Services: Cllr Nonceba Molwele

Members of the Mayoral Committee

Ward Councillor: Cllr Shirley Nefumbada

Fellow Councillors

Members of the Johannesburg AIDS Council,

Officials and Managers,

Representatives of Reproductive Health Research Unit

The Greater Orange Farm Community

The Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Programme Director, we are gathered here today to celebrate the official 50% achievement of provision of ARVs Services city-wide.

Next month, together with many communities across the world, on the 1st of December, we will commemorate the World AIDS Day. HIV and AIDS is one of the subject matter that has a truly global impact and the ability to unite people across all geographic, language and cultural divides.

I believe that the health question is a developmental matter rather than a technical abstract. Health issues are central to matters of development. An investment in health care is a critical contribution to human development.

Our country has been grappling with many health issues. Included amongst these is Tuberculosis, Malaria in certain parts of the country, periodic Cholera outbreaks and similar illnesses. In the past decade, HIV and AIDS has emerged as one of our critical challenges.

The delivery of primary health care is amongst the key strategic priorities and concerns of the City of Johannesburg. We believe that the delivery of this service is in line with the City's policy of pushing back the frontiers of poverty.

Programme Director, let me emphasise that this City is determined to fight the battle against HIV/AIDS using optimally the resources we have at our disposal. We will continue, as we always do to mobilise all sectors of the community wherever they may be found - be it in taxi ranks, in the streets or in communities to fight HIV/AIDS. We need to deepen an understanding amongst the community about the preventative measures against HIV/AIDS, and to help dispel all kinds of myths and misperceptions surrounding HIV/AIDS.

Programme Director, today we are here in Weiler's Farm, which is in Ward 6 with a population of 34 574. The levels of income in this area are reflected by informal settlements and RDP houses.

The overarching problem of this area is its historically based poverty. With unavoidably limited means, this has to be tackled slowly, focusing on such key issues as:

Unemployment;

Health care and education, especially in the areas of

HIV/Aids and TB;

Environmental degradation;

and Housing.

There can be no dispute that such adverse conditions give rise to many social problems. The health situation in this region tends to be characterised by illnesses such as TB, malnutrition, diarrhea, upper respiratory diseases, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) the spread of HIV/AIDS, diabetes and hypertension. Most of these diseases are poverty related.

During the 2010/11 financial year, the city upgraded the Weilers Farm Clinic at the cost of R1 600 000. Since the upgrade, the facility has more additional consulting rooms. The clinic has rolled out ARVT Services which was initiated on 25th September 2011. ARVT services are now integrated into the normal Primary Health Care Services and Community Oriented Primary Care. Patients do not need to go to hospital to receive ARVs, they now get it from our clinics.

The number of patients on ARVs is currently at 16 573 and 80 out of 146 facilities provide ARVs on site treatment to HIV and TB patients.

We are encouraged and we note that the city has reached a 50% mark in terms of provision of ARVs. We would, however, also like to urge for the provision of Anti-retrovirals treatment within the context of a comprehensive strategy which includes nutrition.

The challenge of HIV and AIDS requires an intensified comprehensive, multisectoral national response to address the social and economic realities that make certain segments of society most vulnerable, provide tools to prevent infection and provide services designed to mitigate the wide – ranging impact of the epidemic.

Programme Director, please allow me to briefly talk about collective responsibility. HIV/AIDS is a condition that has an impact on a much wider circle of the community than just the person affected or his/her immediate family. I believe that each and every one of us here today knows a friend or a loved one who is either living with AIDS or has already succumbed to the disease.

As a society we have been robbed of the talents and the brilliance of some of our best and brightest who could have made important contributions to the development of South Africa on many terrains.

In a much broader context, HIV/AIDS has a measurable impact on our economic growth and our national productivity. We have to commit significant from our budgets to combat the disease thus diverting resources from other priorities such as job creation or poverty alleviation.

This collective impact, thus, requires a collective response.

I would like to call on everyone here today to take collective responsibility in our national effort to address the scourge of HIV and AIDS. At the family level use every available opportunity to talk openly about issues such as abstinence, faithfulness and the use of condoms.

In our communities, let us speak out against the stigmatisation of people living with AIDS and encourage their integration into society as valued members of our society.

There are many welfare organisations, non government organisations, faith-based societies and community organisations that devote most of their budgets and time towards AIDS education, prevention drives, treatment and caring for those who have been affected.

Programme Director, on behalf of the City citizens and residents of Johannesburg I would like to thank them for their devotion, commitment, caring and the love they extend to their fellow citizens. This is often a thankless task but they are shining examples of how we can take collective responsibility for issues in our community.

I believe that we can turn the tide in our battle against HIV and AIDS, this can be done through the current medical research and the expansion of our scientific knowledge.

I also believe it can be done through the collective efforts of our people as they increasingly start to take personal responsibility for their lifestyle and then start to spread the message to an ever-expanding circle of audiences.

Finally, we should all take responsibility for our attitude. Let us wear the red ribbon with a sense of responsibility.

Thank you