



health

Department of  
Health  
FREE STATE PROVINCE

**MEC FEZI NGUBENTOMBI ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION OF  
ANNUAL DIPLOMA CEREMONY OF NEWLY QUALIFIED NURSES, KESTELL**

**8 April 2011**

Chairperson of Council Dr Van Rhyn  
Member of Council and of Senate  
Head of Department, Dr Kabane  
Members of Top and of Middle Management  
Heads of Nursing and all categories of nurses  
The Minister, guest speaker and sponsors  
Free State School of Nursing (FSSON) staff of all levels and student  
All officials of the Department of Health and other departments invited guest  
Spouses, parents, relatives and friends of our graduates  
And lastly the most important people here today, our graduates

Good morning to you all.

Programme director, it is an established fact that nurses in our country and the whole world are a backbone of the health care system. The government's vision of "A long and healthy lives for all" cannot be achieved without nurses being at the centre stage of the sweeping changes we are effecting in the health care system.

This occasion takes place a day after the historic national nursing summit that took place in Santon, in Gauteng province which was officially opened by the President of the Republic of South Africa. The conference was a genuine resolve by government and many other stakeholders in the health sector to seriously re-position and restore the prestige and glory associated with the nursing profession.

As the Free State province we have listened to the inputs of our nursing summit that took place in February in Kapano Nokeng. We have already agreed and announced that we will indeed work earnestly to establish a nursing directorate to look after the issues affecting nurses.

Our health system is facing many challenges but despite these challenges, we are confident and inspired that our ten point plan derived from the manifesto of the ruling party- the ANC remains a correct path to achieve better health outcomes.

Allow me to take you back down the history around which the noble nursing profession has been fashioned.

When Florence Nightingale (the lady with the lamp) announced her decision to enter the nursing profession in 1845, despite Intense anger and distress of her family, particularly her mother, she was rebelling against the expected role for woman of her status (she was born into a rich family) which was to become a wife and a mother. She worked hard to educate her in the art and science of nursing, in spite of opposition from her family and the restrictive societal code for affluent young English women—she responded to the divine calling.

She cared for people in poverty, travelled Europe and Africa (Egypt), and this is what she had to say about Africa, and the Temple that she saw while sailing the Nile River: "I do not think I ever saw anything which affected me much more than this".

That's the effect images of the temple had on her. Which may possibly have created the premonition that, a star might soon emerge from the continent.

Now, as though a nursing seed was carried through the Nile River waters down south into the Eastern Cape, in the Victoria district of Alice where Cecilia Makiwane was born. Cecilia was raised and taught by her minister father before she entered school, just as was the case with Florence. Her skills were initiated and honed into the divine calling after her teachers training certificate.

I therefore say to you today, the ceremonies of this nature are truly symbolic events, at which exceptional individuals like you are worthy of direct recognition, but where at the same time we are all celebrating something much bigger. The graduation of a new cadre of nursing.

Cecilia Makiwane, despite her old fashioned Victorian appearance, remains a powerful symbol for our nursing profession at this time of transformation and she did so just seven years after professional nursing training first became available in this country.

From today's perspective, Cecilia Makiwane's life sounds commonplace or even dull. But viewed in the context of her times and the society in which she lived, she was quite extraordinary – Just like you today!!

Cecilia Makiwane broke new ground. She was a pioneer and a transformer and clearly she had the staying power, the fire within her, which enabled her to complete the journey on which she set out. These are qualities that speak to many of us in this time of change and opportunity.

The nursing profession in this present age of reconstruction and renewal is deeply reliant on two fundamental qualities suggested by the life of Cecilia Makiwane, namely:

- A foundation of deeply held values and traditions and
- The ability to rise to new challenges and grasp new opportunities and above all, to undertake these actions in response to the needs of our people.

I believe that the centrality of values and commitment demand greater recognition than ever in the light of the challenges that we currently face. The question of the morale of the workers in health service requires to be addressed at a number of levels. In relation to nurse, the recent implementation of Occupation Specific Dispensation (OSD) is amongst the critical interventions even though a lot more remains to be done to improve working conditions.

I believe that we derive a real sense of our significance and our duty if we view ourselves in the light of history. We have relatively recently put behind us a bitterly divided past, which degraded our humanity, and we are in the middle of a major exercise in transformation. It is certainly not an easy exercise – it demands harder work than we ever know. The path is uncharted and Uncertain and very few benefits are instant. But those of us who have committed ourselves to public service during this time should know that our effort is irreplaceable.

The private sector is often an extreme tempting option for skilled nursing professionals. The opportunity of work abroad – in Europe, the United States or the Middle East – may have great attraction, especially for those at the start of their careers.

As government we would never seek to prevent the freedom of movement of our citizens and limit their right to market their skills freely. But I certainly do appeal to your sense of loyalty to this country.

I am sure that the graduates today would be able to tell us that they too, have succeeded by building their services around quite ordinary actions done with genuine compassion. Perhaps they would also tell us that the work often seems endless and the achievements unclear. But occasionally, a glimpse into the heart of someone that you have helped allows you to feel that your work is precious.

I would also like to say to all gathered here that I feel profound respect for the contribution you are about to make and continue to make to the welfare of our province.

Our province and country needs you; it truly needs your strength, knowledge, skill and dedication. You are precious!

Programme director, as our Nightingale Prayer goes, as presented earlier on, I also do concur that today; we celebrate the flame of Florence Nightingale's legacy. Let that same light be rekindled to burn brightly in our hearts.

Today marks an important milestone in the lives of students receiving their diplomas today. It is a day they will proudly remember long after the celebrations of the achievement is over.

It is an achievement which is not only for themselves but which is also extended to their parents, relatives and friends as well as to us as a Department of Health, especially the Kestell community who are our hosts today.

Let humility, respect, expertise, outstanding service, focus and team spirit be a means to help us accomplish the mission of a long and healthy life for the free state community and at the same time turn us into human instruments of healing with the right attitude.

Thank you.