

The Weekly

GOVERNMENT HELPS MORE RURAL PATIENTS

August 10, 2012



Providing rural health ... Health MEC Fezi Ngubentombi's primary health care programme has assisted thousands of rural patients

The Free State health department has implemented a progressive programme that will make provision of health care services to patients in the comfort of their own homes by various teams of medical specialists

The Free State department of health has reached 390 000 patients through the Primary Health Care Re-engineering (PHC) process, with 51 outreach teams deployed to five districts across 51 Wards.

This process started in February 2012 after it was launched in 2011. It was set to pave way for implementation of National Health Insurance (NHI) piloted in the Thabo Mofutsanyane District.

The PHC consists of family health teams which go to patients at their homes. They start by assessing the profiles of the household's and follow-up by providing the needed health care service based on their findings.

The school health team visits no fee schools to assess the pupils. This includes conducting oral health, visual, hearing, mental health and disability screening assessment.

The last team comprises of district specialists. This is where health specialists are appointed to lead these teams in all the districts.

"We have 20 teams in Thabo Mofutsanyane, nine in Lejweleputswa, 11 in Fezile Dabi, four in Xhariep and seven in Mangaung. Basically when we go to households, we check how many people are living in one house, whether there are pregnant women, sick people who need their medication or not," said the acting general manager of district health services, Papi Maarohanye.

"This process is very effective because we have found that people have abandoned going to clinics and hospital. This is because of either the distance or long queues associated with going to clinics. This is also necessary because it has decreased the number of people going to a health care centre for something they can be provided with at their homes," said Maarohanye.

The department has purchased 10 scooters, to enable community workers to reach their working stations. The scooters have been distributed to districts; however, more transportation is needed to transport patients in remote areas from their homes to the relevant working stations.

It will also help in distributing chronic diseases medication to patients' homes.

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“We are also working on providing these community health workers with identification cards. This will help in identify themselves during their visits. The issue of the security especially for our female workers is considered and plans to protect them are made. They also need to get a uniform so that people can be able to identify them. This will help people to trust them when they visit their homes.”

The PHC’s mission is to ensure universal access to health care by those who need it. It also aims to lessen the burdens that primary health care facilities have to bear.

When the MEC for health, Fezi Ngubentombi, launched the programme in 2010, she called on retired health care professionals especially nurses to volunteer their services.

Mary Khola, who has been working as a nurse for over 35 years, has heeded Ngubentombi’s call after retiring in 2009. She was 60 years when she retired and she wanted to enjoy her old age.

Her passion to care for the sick has reawakened her urge to help. She told The Weekly the programme is very helpful especially in rural areas.

“This is a very fulfilling and interesting job for me. I have been a nurse in the hospital setups, but never in a community. I am used to seeing people coming to me at hospital for help and not vice versa. Taking services to people is fulfilling because it makes you a better person. This job has given me more skills than I had in the past.”

She said she has been helping patients that had abandoned treatment because of the long distances they travel to clinics and hospitals.

“One person approached me during one of my visits to the community. She told me about an old man who could not breath and was very sick. With my experience as a nurse, I saw that the man was experiencing cardiac failure and his tongue and eyes were blue. I phoned the ambulance immediately and he was admitted to the hospital. That man has now successfully recovered.”

According to Khola, the PHC programme is effective and should be implemented in all rural communities across the country.

[Source: www.theweekly.co.za]