

The Weekly

GOVERNMENT CIRCUMCISES OVER 1 000 YOUNG MEN

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Promoting safe circumcision ... Acting MEC for health, Msebenzi Zwane

The Free State department of health, in partnership with the perinatal HIV research unit (PHRU), officially opened a circumcision clinic at the Pelonomi Hospital last week.

The establishment of the clinic, which has been operating for the past five months, follows the shocking deaths of several boys at various initiation schools in the province. The clinic is called Hola Monna, Itshireletse, which is Sesotho for “Grow up man, protect yourself.”

The clinic can conduct up to 50 circumcisions a day. The clinic has to date provided quick, safe and painless circumcision to over 1 000 young men.

The circumcision of men has been hailed as one of the means to fight the scourge of HIV/AIDS in the country. It reduces the chances of contracting HIV by 60 percent compared to uncircumcised men.

“The perinatal HIV research unit received funding as a sub-recipient under the Society for Family Health from the centre for disease control (CDC) to start massive male circumcision programmes in the Free State and Gauteng provinces.

PHRU director, Limakatso Lebina, said the programme has been established in collaboration with the department of health, the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality (MMM) and the Pelonomi Hospital.

The main objectives of the mass male circumcision project within the public sector at Pelonomi and Botshabelo Hospital is to increase the number of circumcisions done at each hospital by 50 per cent over a period of six months. The project also aims to ensure that over 90 percent of men circumcised are HIV tested and counseled prior to circumcision.

These men will also be screened for Tuberculosis (TB) and for sexually transmitted infections. If these men test positive for HIV they will be referred for care and treatment at the appropriate facility.

The Pelonomi Hospital management has identified a previously unused isolation ward to be used for the male circumcision programme.

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The location of this ward will improve access for young men who want circumcision, and will not interfere with the general patient flow within the hospital. Renovations started in July 2012 and the premises were functional from August 2012.

“Young men do not utilise health facilities often and most will be coming into contact with a health professional for the first time. It is therefore imperative that we make this encounter as pleasant as possible so that they may return in future for other health problems,” said Lebina.

Approximately 1 270 people have visited the clinic for medical male circumcision. In the last four months a total of 1 122 have been circumcised. Three percent of the clients who tested at the site for HIV tested positive and were referred for further care.

One of the young men who were circumcised at the clinic, Sibonile Mokwena (24), from Odendaalsrus waxed lyrical about the medical procedure.

“I opted to come to this clinic because I have no cultural obligation to do it the traditional way. People must understand that this is just another option and if they choose to go to initiation school to be circumcised then they must do it. I just felt it is safer here, and I trust that the staff people are well-trained to perform this procedure.”

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