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Organization

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26 EMASWATI AWARDED CERTIFICATES AFTER COMPLETING THE AVOHC SURGE TRAINING

The Kingdom of Eswatini has produced the first 26 Emaswati ready to respond to emergencies affecting the African region.

These responders named Nkwe! African Health Volunteers Corps by Minister of Health Honorable Mduduzi Matsebula will contribute to a pool of over 3000 emergency responders to be trained in the African region under the African Health Volunteers Corps (AVoHC) SURGE trainings. AVoHC is a network of African volunteer medical and public health professionals established by the African Union to support emergency response to disease outbreaks in Africa.

The country's target is to train at least 100 experts to respond to emergencies within and outside the country. During the certification ceremony held in Mbabane, the Minister of Health Honorable Mduduzi Matsebula remarked that this was a milestone in the Eswatini health sector. Eswatini is among 17 countries to have benefitted from this Emergency Preparedness and Response Flagship initiative which was launched by WHO AFRO in collaboration with Africa CDC.



One of the participants Bongani Tsabedze receiving his certificate from Minister of Health Hon. Mduduzi Matsebula and the WHO Representative Dr Susan Tembo

The AVoHC-SURGE training aims to empower African countries to be prepared to respond to health emergencies and humanitarian crises within 24 - 48 hours from the time of the first incident. This initiative has three components - Promoting Resilience of Systems for Emergencies (PROSE) which focuses on

preparedness, Transforming African Surveillance Systems (TASS) which focuses on detection and Strengthening and Utilizing Response Groups for Emergencies (SURGE) which focuses on response.

In a bid to strengthen capacity for crisis preparedness and response in the African continent, WHO is collaborating with member states to strengthen the response infrastructure. Africa is leading the way in protecting the world from pandemics and progress has been made in ensuring health security is strengthened through proven public health interventions. This includes reducing the number and duration of outbreaks as well as building capacity through the AVoHC SURGE trainings.

The Eswatini team was taken through different modules conducted in two phases, the first one being the on-boarding phase which was completed in 2023. Topics covered during the training include introduction to WHO Emergency Response Framework, risk assessment and grading, emergency management planning, Emergency management legal framework, Policies, plans and procedures, External Communication, Procurement and Infection, Prevention and Control (IPC). The trainings utilized participative methodologies combining presentations with group work and practical sessions. In March 2024, the team completed the course and were awarded certificates by the Honorable Minister of Health.

“As the Minister of Health, I am immensely proud and thrilled to certify the first batch of 26 highly trained emergency responders, out of the country's target of 100 experts. These ready-for-deployment multidisciplinary experts will be deployed nationally and internationally to respond to epidemics and health emergencies. It is no doubt that the country is gaining an equipped human resource that adds to its preparedness for global and national epidemics and health emergencies, emergencies,” the Minister said.

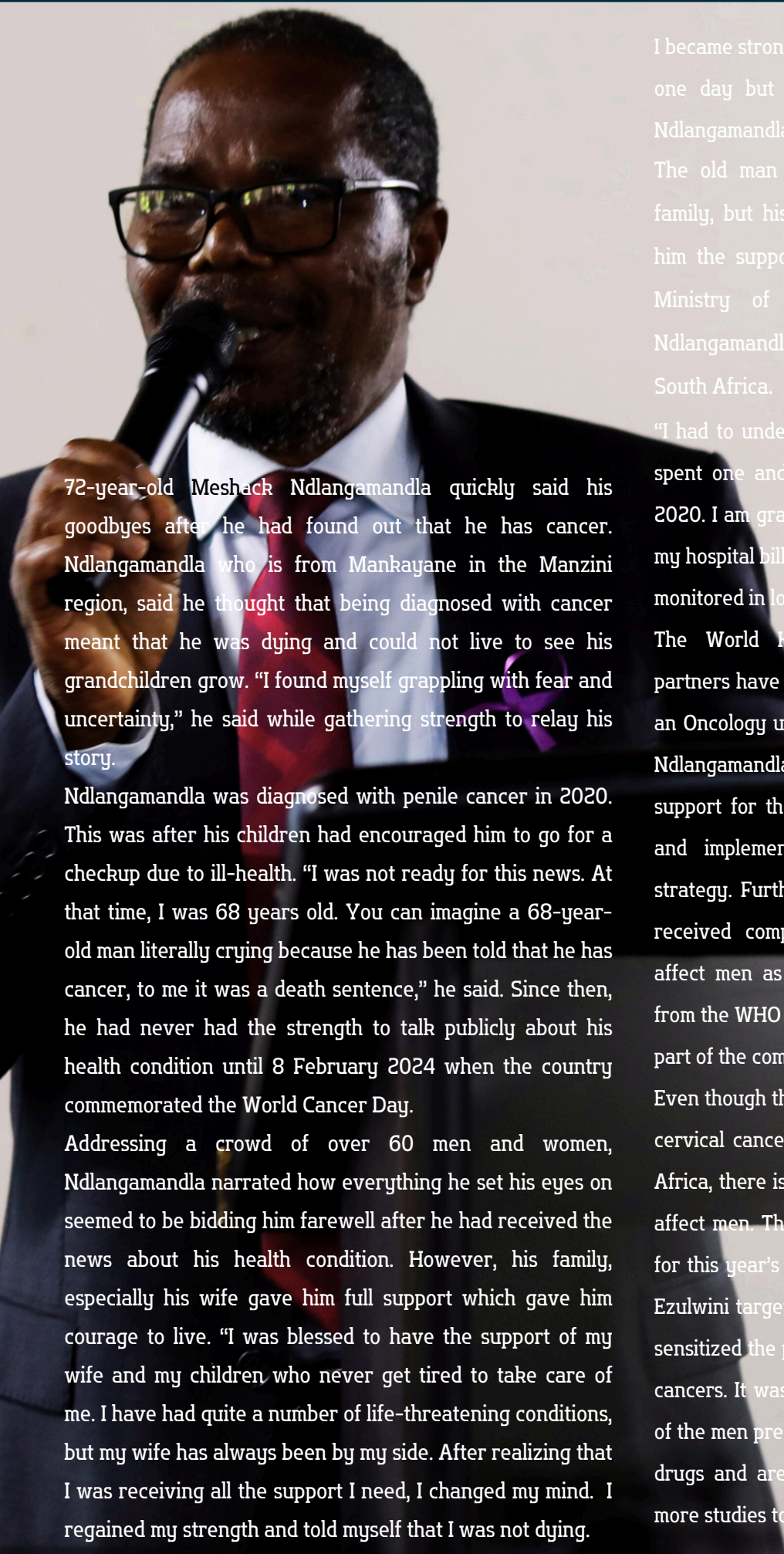
Making his remarks Honorable Matsebula said “It is of paramount importance that Eswatini stands ready to respond to health emergencies, in line with the global call for strong resilient health care services. This is -



another giant step taken towards achieving our goal. It is also a true reflection of the Ministry's commitment to taking the *Nkwe!* (On Your marks) approach in improving public health care. The Minister thanked the World Health Organization (WHO) for its leadership in developing policies that guide the health sector in countries and setting global standards. Making remarks during the certification ceremony the WHO Representative Dr. Susan Tembo expressed her gratitude to the Government of Eswatini for organizing the training. Dr Tembo thanked the participants for their dedication and active engagement in the learning experience. "The training covered essential topics such as the day-to-day management and operations of the Public Health Emergency Operations Centre (PHEOC), the structure and roles of Rapid Response Teams, as well as a module on Humanitarian Response and Health Coordination Response. The training integrated case study examples and conducted simulation exercises to enhance skills in managing public health emergencies and tackling challenges. We strongly encourage the country to carry out the flagship scoping mission for the Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR), as outlined in the WHO Regional Strategy for Health Security and Emergencies 2022-2030," she said.



HOW I BEAT CANCER- 72-YEAR-OLDR OLD SURVIVOR SPEAKS



72-year-old Meshack Ndlangamandla quickly said his goodbyes after he had found out that he has cancer. Ndlangamandla who is from Mankayane in the Manzini region, said he thought that being diagnosed with cancer meant that he was dying and could not live to see his grandchildren grow. “I found myself grappling with fear and uncertainty,” he said while gathering strength to relay his story.

Ndlangamandla was diagnosed with penile cancer in 2020. This was after his children had encouraged him to go for a checkup due to ill-health. “I was not ready for this news. At that time, I was 68 years old. You can imagine a 68-year-old man literally crying because he has been told that he has cancer, to me it was a death sentence,” he said. Since then, he had never had the strength to talk publicly about his health condition until 8 February 2024 when the country commemorated the World Cancer Day.

Addressing a crowd of over 60 men and women, Ndlangamandla narrated how everything he set his eyes on seemed to be bidding him farewell after he had received the news about his health condition. However, his family, especially his wife gave him full support which gave him courage to live. “I was blessed to have the support of my wife and my children who never get tired to take care of me. I have had quite a number of life-threatening conditions, but my wife has always been by my side. After realizing that I was receiving all the support I need, I changed my mind. I regained my strength and told myself that I was not dying.

I became strong inside and fought. I know am going to die one day but I told myself, not yet” the courageous Ndlangamandla said.

The old man did not only receive support from his family, but his church and the government also gave him the support he needed to live. The government-Ministry of Health through Phalala Fund sent Ndlangamandla for specialized cancer treatment in South Africa.

“I had to undergo radiotherapy in South Africa where I spent one and half months and returned in November 2020. I am grateful to the government for taking care of my hospital bill through Phalala Fund and I continue to be monitored in local health facilities,” he said.

The World Health Organization (WHO) and other partners have supported the Ministry of Health to set up an Oncology unit where many cancer patients, including Ndlangamandla receive care. WHO is also providing support for the country to introduce HPV DNA testing and implementation of the HPV global elimination strategy. Further, like many other men, Ndlangamandla received comprehensive information on cancers that affect men as the Ministry of Health, through support from the WHO intensified health education for cancers as part of the commemoration of World Cancer Day 2024.

Even though the country is battling with a high burden of cervical cancer, like most countries in the sub-Saharan Africa, there is also a noticeable increase in cancers that affect men. The Ministry of Health thus focused on men for this year’s commemoration. During a meeting held in Ezulwini targeting corporate men, the Ministry of Health sensitized the participants on the growing burden of men cancers. It was highlighted during the meeting that most of the men presenting with cancers are on anti-retroviral drugs and are virally suppressed, hence a need to do more studies to ascertain the root cause of the infections.

WORLD CANCER DAY COMMEMORATION IN PICTURES



Ministry of Health PS Mr. Khanyakwezwe Mabuza (centre) making his submission while WHO Representative Dr Susan Tembo (left) and Mr. Meshack Ndlangamanda listen.



Eswatini Sugar Association Chief Executive Officer Mr. Banele Nyamane (left) among the participants during the commemoration



National Cancer Coordination Unit Program Manager Xolisile Dlamini (right) listening to presentations.

WORLD CANCER DAY: MEN HOLD CAUCUS SESSION ON CANCERS

A caucus session held with men from the informal sector found that there is a problem in health facilities where they take a long time to bring back blood results. Some of the men who made their submissions during the male caucus held in Mbabane stated that the delay in getting results may also be the cause of late detection of the disease among men. They submitted that, whilst waiting, some men resolve to get herbal concoctions which give temporal relief. On the other hand, some of the participants mentioned that Emaswati are a nation that believes in prayer, hence many don't rush to the hospital when sick, but first consult traditional healers and spiritual healers and go to the hospital when the disease has already progressed. On the 4th of February every year, the world unites to promote awareness on cancer as a public health issue and to strengthen actions towards improving access to quality care, screening, early detection, treatment and palliative care. Between 2022 and 2024, the focus of World Cancer Day is to help "Close the cancer care gap." This year marks the third and final year of the campaign. The global theme for this year is "Together, we challenge those in power". This theme encompasses the global demand for all leaders to prioritize and invest in cancer prevention and -



National Cancer Unit Prevention Officer Nokwethu Mkumane conducting health education on male cancers during the men caucus



Eswatini Kidney Foundation Chief Executive Officer Mr Nkosingathi Dlamini addressing the men during the caucus session.

care and to do more to achieve a just and cancer-free world. In 2022, close to 883,000 new cancer cases occurred in the WHO African Region with around 573 653 deaths. About 50% of new cancer cases in adults in the region are due to breast, cervical, prostate, colorectal, and liver cancers. This situation is not different for Eswatini. In 2022, cervical cancer, prostate and breast cancer were the most common cancers affecting Emaswati. Cervical cancer is the most diagnosed cancer among women, and it is also the leading cause of cancer related deaths in Eswatini. Similarly, prostate cancer is the leading cancer in men also causing most deaths among men.

Speaking at the commemoration event, WHO Eswatini Representative Dr Susan Tembo reiterated that cancer control is an integral component of the path towards Universal Health Coverage and a reduction in premature deaths by 2030. "If urgent measures are not taken, cancer mortality in the region is projected to reach about one million deaths by 2030," Dr Tembo said adding that stakeholders need to collectively identify feasible -

priorities, implement evidence-based population-wide interventions and invest in cancer control. She emphasized that countries should use the updated WHO Best Buys, the facilitative tool designed to enable governments to select lifesaving policies and interventions for noncommunicable diseases including cancer. She further congratulated the Kingdom of Eswatini for being counted among 28 countries in the region that have nationwide HPV vaccination to protect young girls from getting cervical cancer in the future. "We applaud the Ministry of Health for the continued commitment shown in eliminating cervical cancer in Eswatini. Completing the development of the Eswatini cervical cancer elimination plan will also accelerate country investments and efforts towards eliminating cervical cancer in Eswatini. Together, we challenge those in power and men to go the extra mile for a cancer-free Eswatini," she said.

COMMUNITY HEALTH DAY AT NTFONJENI



10 YEARS OF DIALYSIS, KIDNEY PATIENT THANKFUL FOR HEALTH SERVICES

Nomsa Kunene, a woman living with chronic kidney disease says she is grateful to be alive after being on dialysis treatment for the past 10 years.

10 years ago, Kunene visited the hospital where she was first diagnosed with stomach ulcers after complaining about pain around her abdomen. After being given anti-acid on several occasions, she was then admitted at the Mbabane Government Hospital as her condition deteriorated.

Luckily, unlike many, her employer- the Eswatini government supported her new journey of having to do dialysis three times a week. "I received a lot of support from my employer - the Royal Eswatini Police Service where I work as support staff, hence the fear of losing my job was not of concern anymore. I just focused on the new journey, and I was encouraged to live," Kunene told a gathering of over 70 people during the commemoration of World Kidney Day in Mbabane. She said she received a lot of support from her partner, which further changed her mind set and helped to overcome her fear.



Nomsa Kunene speaking during the World Kidney Day commemoration in Mbabane

Kunene also thanked the Doctors and Nurses for giving her hope and encouragement, which has led to her being alive 10 years later. "If it wasn't for dialysis I would have died a long time ago," she said.

"I was admitted at Mbabane government hospital for a month and whilst there, I had to do blood transfusion since my HB was low at 4. Upon further investigation the Doctors discovered that I had advanced kidney disease that would require dialysis," she said. Kunene says, on receiving this news she became very concerned about how she was going to balance work and having to do dialysis three times a week. Many employers do not allow their employees to be absent -

from work, and with her condition, it meant quitting her job. Kunene emphasised that people need to avoid herbal concoctions and buying over-the-counter medicines so that they do not damage their kidneys. "I would like to encourage others to be always vigilant when they have symptoms and rush to the hospital. I have seen others who came early enough, they did dialysis and were discharged," she said.

Kunene further requested government to open up for kidney transplant because it is a life-saving procedure and also ensure that people who are on dialysis do not lose their jobs.

Chronic kidney disease can result from untreated or previous acute kidney injury, communicable diseases such as HIV, Hepatitis B, hepatitis C, syphilis, malaria, bilharzia, untreated throat infections (post streptococcal glomerulonephritis), COVID19. Other causes may include drugs and toxins such as chronic use of painkillers and herbal concoctions.

Chronic kidney disease is estimated to affect more than 850 million people worldwide and resulted in over 3.1 million deaths in 2019. Presently, kidney disease ranks as the 8th leading cause of death, and if left unaddressed, it is projected to be the 5th leading cause of years of life lost by 2040.

In Eswatini, there are currently over 300 Emaswati living with kidney disease. In the year 2000 – the Government of Eswatini established a state funded renal replacement therapy for patients with kidney failure under the professional guidance of Dr N. Matekere, Anesthesiologist/Critical Care Consultant. Since then, Government funded Renal Replacement Therapy has been offered to all those who require it. About 219 patients have received dialysis at the three government facilities including Mbabane Government Hospital, Raleigh Fitkin Memorial Hospital and Hlatikhulu Government Hospital between June 2015 and May 2016. Through technical guidance from the World Health Organization (WHO) and other partners, in 2014 the government of Eswatini introduced a Nephrology Clinic at the Mbabane Government Hospital for early detection and prevention of kidney disease with arrival of resident Nephrologist; now run by Specialist Physicians.

During the commemoration of World Kidney Day, Eswatini Kidney Foundation Patron Prince Mcwasho pleaded with the government to decentralise dialysis facilities to at least all the four regions and sub-regions



Eswatini Kidney Foundation Chief Executive Officer Mr Nkosinathi Dlamini delivering remarks on behalf of the patron Prince Mcwasho



Participants from different sectors listening to presentations during the meeting

of the country so that renal patients would not have to travel long distances to get help as they end up defaulting dialysis which leads to untimely deaths. Speaking through the Foundations' Chief Executive Officer Mr. Nkosinathi Dlamini, the Prince added that others end up sleeping in hospital hallways to reduce travelling costs to the health facilities. "Decentralizing the dialysis units will eliminate long hours spent by renal patients in hospitals waiting for their turn and further eliminate camping in hospital hallways," the Prince said.

The theme for this year's commemoration was "KIDNEY HEALTH FOR ALL: Advancing Equitable Access to Care and Optimal Medication Practice." The event held in Mbabane was attended by over 70 people. Clinicians and WHO technical officers delivered presentations on kidney disease during the event, with the aim to educate the public and media present.

ESWATINI COMMEMORATES WORLD TB DAY



Hundreds of Emaswati joined the World TB Day commemoration held in the Lubombo region.

The event held at Mpolonjeni Inkhundla, started with a march to sensitize local communities about TB. The commemoration was attended by pupils from surrounding schools and members of the community. The theme for this year's commemoration was 'Yes! We can end TB!'.

The theme conveys a message of hope that following the negative impact of COVID-19 in the TB response, getting back-on-track to turn the tide against the TB epidemic is possible. TB is an old disease that was discovered on March 24, 1882 (142 years ago). TB is a preventable and treatable disease. Despite the strides made in technologies to prevent, diagnose, and treat TB, the disease continues to be the second leading cause of death after COVID-19 from a single infectious agent, surpassing the toll of HIV/AIDS. According to the latest report, in the African region about 2.5 million individuals contracted TB in 2022, equating to one person every 13 seconds. Additionally, the number of TB deaths in 2022 reached 424,000, resulting in the loss of one life every minute—even when TB is preventable and treatable.

The WHO Representative Dr Susan Tembo, speaking at the commemoration mentioned that these figures underscore the urgency of our collective action in addressing the ongoing TB epidemic and the need for sustained efforts to ending it. WHO is supporting the African region including Eswatini in the fight against TB by setting strategic directions, developing tools for monitoring, for example: the African TB scorecard with the African Union, and ensuring progress towards the implementation of the End TB Strategy.



Minister of Health Hon. Mdunduzi Matsebula making his remarks during the World TB Day commemoration



WHO Representative Dr Susan Tembo delivering her speech



Different organizations provided services on the day

“The World Health Organization is dedicated to generating and sharing knowledge on effective TB control methods. We support countries by updating TB treatment guidelines to reflect the latest practices and expanding access to rapid diagnostic tools,” Dr Tembo said, further applauding the Government of Eswatini for being an early adopter of the WHO recommendation and the continued use of local and global evidence to guide the national TB response. The introduction of newer TB diagnostic machines, medicines and innovative interventions for TB in

Eswatini is indeed saving lives as evident in the continued decline in the number of reported TB cases and TB Deaths. Dr Tembo further emphasised that what still remains is finding those have been missed. “We note that plans are underway for the government, Global fund, and Partners to introduce the chest x-ray and computer aided device to close the TB case finding gap. As WHO we would like to applaud these efforts and further urge that we also increase efforts to finding TB in Children,” she said.

The WHO Rep said there is also a need to provide TB screening and TB preventive therapy for the most at-risk populations especially people living with HIV and household contacts of those diagnosed with TB. The recent publication by WHO entitled “Funding a tuberculosis-free future: an investment case for screening and preventive treatment” shows a return of up to US\$ 39 for each dollar invested in TB screening and TP Prevention therapy.

There is also need to ensure consistent supply of TB of medicines and laboratory supplies with zero stock outs. “I urge the government and all stakeholders to prioritize a multi-sector approach that addresses the root causes of the disease while bolstering the health system efforts in prevention, diagnosis, and treatment. Addressing the social determinants of TB, such as poverty, inequality, and limited access to healthcare, to achieve sustainable outcomes is paramount. In Eswatini HIV and malnutrition are the main drivers of the disease and addressing these is essential to accelerate progress,” she said. Dr Tembo further called upon Government and all stakeholders to continue providing resources, enhancing community engagement, conducting research, and forming private-sector partnerships to support implementation of the National Strategic plan for TB.

CANCER COMMUNITY OUTREACH IN NGOMANE/ THUNZINI



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



KINGDOM of ESWATINI
Ministry of Health

