

CLARITY ON THE EASTERN CAPE SCOOTERS PROGRAMME

We have received backlash from the public and media queries regarding the scooters that have been provided for health workers when doing their field work and home visits.

We write to clarify that these motorbikes (not scooters) are NOT in any way meant to replace ambulances. Basic emergency medical service protocol will not allow for this and we would not in any way support this. This is an intervention designed to bring health care closer to the people.

One of the complaints that the Eastern Cape Department of Health has received from rural communities is that because of lack of road infrastructure, especially in rural areas, ambulances do not reach people who are sick, especially the elderly. The members of the community end up having to put an individual in a wheelbarrow or walking a long distance whilst carrying a patient until they reach a road where the ambulance can go.

The MEC then saw these community health worker motorbikes as an opportunity to address those instances. These are motorbikes that are designed for off-road capabilities and the intention is for these units to be able to transport patients to the nearest clinic so that ambulances can concentrate on transporting patients from clinics to facilities offering higher levels of care. The motorbikes are appendaged by both sitting and supine units which are fully waterproofed so that even those who cannot sit up can be accommodated. No patient will be exposed to the elements while being transported in these units.

These units are also versatile in that they can be used as mobile clinics, mobile testing units and mobile medicine delivery units which will support the CCMDD programme.

They can be ridden by two community health workers to carry out the above functions: for example COVID-19 screening in deep rural areas and general health screening and testing for other communicable diseases such as TB and HIV as well as non communicable disease like diabetes and hypertension. Recently, we received a substantial donation of blood pressure machines. This is the kind of opportunity where one pieces all the capacity growth together to allow us to penetrate deeper into communities as we implement our primary health care programmes. So, in this example, health care workers can go into very difficult terrain to bring BP machines to the most outlying and previously underserved communities so they too benefit from the advantages of preventative medicine.

It is for this reason that these community health workers will also carry mobile phones and two way radios so that they can immediately alert emergency medical services personnel should a patient who requires urgent hospitalization be identified.

As part of introducing these motorbikes to the public, mobile clinics, which double as ambulances were also launched as part of the demonstration. This was precisely to demonstrate how we expect the chain of care to function in a way that is helpful and acceptable for our people.

The dignity and health of our people remains a top priority and we will continue to explore all avenues to ensure that even the poorest members of the community enjoy the right to quality health care.

It is proven that when health workers are visible in the community and bring preventative health care into the home, this reduces the burden on health care facilities and ultimately saves people from disability due to ill health or death due to uncontrolled chronic disease. This model has been highly successful in countries like Cuba. It is for this reason that we will continue to promote such initiatives in all provinces that work towards our goal to saving the lives and improving the health of all our people, regardless of their economic status or the area they live in.

Further to this statement we annexe hereto MEC Sindiswa Gomba's statement from the launch yesterday.

For further Queries
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Annexure:

Remarks by the Hon. Health MEC Sindiswa Gomba at the 100 EMS Scooters launch on 12 June 2020.

Protocol observed

We are fighting the spread of COVID-19 and most of our energy is focused on that. But that does not mean we have neglected other health issues.

This is why we are gathered here today, which is a historic day for our province and the department as we are launching the 100 EMS scooters I announced when I tabled the budget and policy speech last month.

These are not your ordinary scooters. They are specialised and have beds. We are introducing the use of scooters because for far too long we have had how our ambulances could not get to people in far-flung rural areas.

Ours is a rural province and because of its terrain, we sometimes could not get to people who desperately need medical attention, especially when it rains.

Not anymore. That will now be a thing of the past. With these scooters, we will be able to get to some of the most remote areas. We are ensuring that people in hinterlands also get an effective and efficient health care service.

Minister Mkhize we are ensuring that just because people live in rural areas should not disadvantage them. Not anymore. We are levelling the playing fields with these specialised scooters so that we do not hear horrific stories of how people's lives might have been saved had ambulances been able to get to them.

We want everyone to have access to medical care. The Department has its fair share of challenges, that much we acknowledge, but getting to people regardless of their location should not be one of them.

It will not be one of them anymore. Even if you are in the mountainous Matatiele or Lusikisiki we will get to you. No matter how treacherous the roads leading to your village we will now be able to get to people in need of medical care.

Altronnexus, a tech company based in Johannesburg has also donated 200, 2 way radios that will be used for communication by teams in the frontline service fighting the COVID19 pandemic.

The radios, which work on a GSM cellular network, will be distributed to each district for allocation to the teams that will operate the scooters.

The radios work on the basis that teams within a district can communicate with each other as well as team leaders across districts.

We are grateful for the donation as these 2- way radios will help our teams stay in communication. This is truly the spirit of Thuma Mina and Ubuntu.

When companies like Altronnexus work with the government, we can achieve a great deal together.

Indeed, working together we can do more. We are calling on other companies to do their bit in helping us ensure we deliver effective and efficient services.

We are improving our EMS and we will continue doing that.

But ladies and gentlemen, our ambulance crews have been under siege from criminals who have targeted them. That has to end because when ambulance crews are attacked and robbed, that will disadvantage the whole community, as no one will willingly go to hotspot areas.

We have to call thugs out and report them to law enforcement agencies so that our EMS crews can continue doing what they do best: taking services to people and saving lives.

We cannot have a situation where we have no go areas. That is unacceptable. Those attacking EMS crews are our brothers, sisters and neighbours and we need to stop burying our heads in a sand but speak up when we witness such attacks. People can report to the Department or the SAPS anonymously.

Minister Mkhize has been in the province monitoring our response to COVID-19. We were in the OR Tambo District yesterday and I am happy that the Minister was happy with the work being done there. That district has turned things around and must continue with its diligent work.

But unfortunately our confirmed cases of COVID-19 continue rising and as of last night we had 7868 confirmed cases recoveries 3647 and 178 deaths.

To the families and friends who have lost their loved ones to the pandemic we are sending our deep sympathies. May their souls rest in eternal peace.

One death is one too many.

This is why we want to also call on people to continue adhering to the lockdown regulations by washing their hands with soap and water or sanitiser regularly, wear masks or cloth whenever they are in public and practise social distancing.

It is up to each one of us to stop the spread of this virus by staying at home.

We have seen how some people have put masks on their chins instead of covering their mouths and nose.

Ezinye izinto azifuni timing mzi wakuthi. Madincele sibxibeni masks ngalo lonke ixesha.

You should not be policed for you to wear your mask. This is not about "beating the system" as abanye abantu seem to think but about saving lives.

Let's all please play our part so that our hard working and dedicated nurses and doctors will not be overwhelmed.

Ndiyabulela.