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Dr Patrick Ngassa Piotie
The Chairperson: Diabetes Alliance
8 Empire Eva
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Dear Dr Piotie

AN OPEN LETTER FROM THE DIABETES ALLIANCE AHEAD OF THE WORLD DIABETES DAY ON 14 NOVEMBER 2022

I thank you for your letter dated 07 November 2022 in which you express concerns about the status of the prevention and control of Diabetes in the country. While noting that the Department must further enhance patient outcomes, please allow me to respond to the specific issues raised:

1. Introduction of a standardised and coordinated diabetes education program for both patients and health care providers.

Patients: The Department of Health presently implements various interventions aimed at strengthening diabetes education through a coordinated and integrated approach.

The Department employs Community Health Workers (CHWs) who offer integrated health services to households and individuals within their catchment area. The core components of the integrated services include:

- Promotion of the overall health and well-being within households and communities.
- Provision of information, health education and promotion of healthy behaviour to prevent diseases including non-communicable diseases of which diabetes is a priority.
- Profiling members of the household including on their risk behaviour and diagnosed disease.
- Conducting structured household screening including on hypertension and diabetes and encouraging that patients are linked to care.

Education programs are further enhanced by the Department developing a Health Calendar of Events which is realised by conducting awareness campaigns utilizing different channels of communication which among others includes: radio, television, and other forms of social media. Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials on different health conditions are developed to empower the patients, families and communities on different health conditions including diabetes.

I am also pleased to share with you that the Department is in the process of rolling out the National Non-Communicable Diseases Campaign. The Aim and Objectives of the National NCD Campaign (NNCDC) are to strengthen the district's community-based response in line with the Integrated People Centred

Health Service approach on the prevention and control of NCDs, with an initial focus on hypertension, diabetes, obesity, and mental health.

Health Care Providers: Continuous professional education (In-service Training) is an inherent function of all Human Resources Development (HRD) components at the Department of Health at National and Provincial levels. HRD components are responsible for responding to the training needs of all health care workers. Regional Training Centers (RTCs) are established within the HRD components in all Provinces to coordinate and conduct mostly clinical in-service training through blended training modalities.

Health care workers providing services for NCDs are capacitated using evidence based clinical guidelines and tools, including the Adult Primary Care tool (APC) and the Standard Treatment Care Guidelines (STGs) which are updated on a regular basis. Training on diabetes is incorporated in the Adult Primary Care (APC) guideline. The APC content on diabetes includes symptomatic diagnoses and treatment as well as routine management and care for diabetes patients as a chronic condition and this clinical tool is aligned with National Department of Health policies and clinical protocols.

This clinical tool and training package are approved by the National Department of Health and is currently being implemented through the provincial RTCs. The APC course for health workers is packaged as (i) online study material that is comprehensive enough to be utilized as self-study; and (ii) facilitated and interactive workshops. I am pleased to inform you we have successfully achieved high coverage of training for health care workers in the public sector through our on-line platform.

The development of the APC tool underlies the following additional deliverables.

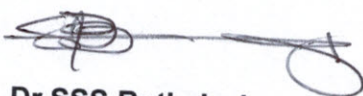
- The implementation of the 'Health for All' Health Promotion Tool which promotes education on NCDs including Diabetes and Hypertension for patients and their families.
- The inclusion of Diabetes content in the undergraduate professional education curricula of all health professionals (e.g., medical, nursing, pharmacy, and paramedicine).
- The incorporation of Diabetes in-service training for health care workers.

2. Recognition and formalisation of the role of diabetic educators.

I note your proposal on health care workers, trained as diabetic educators to function exclusively in the field of Diabetes. Regrettably this is not possible within our country's context of an increasing number of patients with Diabetes experiencing multi-morbidities and the need for the Department to adopt an integrated approach to health service deliver. You are assured that the Department remains committed toward strengthening the competency of existing health care workers on diabetes through training programs for all levels of health care workers through undergraduate and in-service training programs.

In conclusion, I welcome the communication from the Diabetes Alliance and look forward to our partnership as we endeavour to jointly strengthen our response to the prevention and control of NCDs including Diabetes.

Yours sincerely



Dr SSS Buthelezi
Director-General: Health

Date: 21/02/2023