

Media statement

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Buying power and lack of regular exercise the reasons for the country's high rate of non-communicable diseases – Dietician warns DENOSA wellness workshop

The buying power and lack of regular exercises by many professionals are the two main reasons why South Africa is among the countries with the high burden of non-communicable diseases (NCD), which threatens the potential of the country's socio-economic growth, a senior dietician warned a wellness workshop organised by Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa (DENOSA) in North West.

With South Africa's socio-economic status improving gradually, this brings with it new health problems whose results can be witnessed at the country's various outpatient departments. Most people at many hospitals' outpatient departments are there to collect medication for non-communicable diseases.

Serati Seema, a senior dietician at Mafikeng Provincial Hospital in North West, said because of their busy work schedule, professionals find it easy to buy food with high sugar and fat concentrates from the many food retailers as a quick fix, and feed this to their children too.

"And even when they do that, they choose the food that tastes great than the rest, forgetting that the tastier the food the more unhealthy it often becomes due to high fat and sugar concentration," said Serati. He said the physical exercise that kids used to embark on while playing has since been replaced by TV games which children play while sitting down and eating.

As part of promoting a healthy lifestyle, DENOSA is involved in a wellness programme in the North West province which targets both health professionals as a pilot at the Mafikeng Provincial Hospital and members of the Barolong community, which began last year. The project runs regular aerobic sessions every Wednesday at the hospital, while members of the community embark on gardening and sport activities like netball and soccer. The project is funded by research-based pharmaceutical company PFIZER.

Manager of the project at DENOSA, Brian Dhliwayo, said the decision to choose the two groups was because of the high rate of drug abuse among youth in the community. "The issue of professionals gaining weight is a country-wide problem, which is worse for the country as we are currently faced with an acute shortage of nurses. But combining these activities in the same area will go to show just how effective promoting healthy lifestyle really is across the board, because both worlds are in trouble in terms of not living a healthy lifestyle," he said.

"While this type of project may be the solution to the country's NCD problem, the shortage of funding is what will render this project ineffective if it is not applied on a large scale, which the country needs. It calls for all key stakeholders of the economy, namely: public, private and civic society."

With South Africa being one of highest cases of NCDs, DENOSA's main concern is that this threatens the economic growth and competitiveness of the country, as many professionals quickly become hypertensive as a result of indulging in unhealthy food, and then develop stroke which often leads to their death.

On Friday, participants of the programme together with members of the community took part in the health screening exercise as a means to check their progress by testing for blood pressure, diabetes, and checking their weight. The project runs up until June this year, and the preliminary results of the project will be presented at the International Council of Nurses (ICN) congress in Melbourne, Australia which starts from the 18th to the 23rd of May, where two nurses who are running the project at the site will be sharing the lessons of the project with their colleagues from around the world, as this one of the few projects that are aimed at fighting non-communicable diseases.

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