

Hi-tech lung cancer lab to benefit all

If the country is to reduce its high cancer statistics, the public would have to be educated about the illness and preventative measures taken, says Gauteng Health MEC, Dr Gwen Ramokgopa.



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Ramokgopa was speaking at the launch of the state-of-the-art Lung Laboratory at the Helen Joseph Hospital, in Johannesburg.

The facility forms part of a comprehensive R20m grant from the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation (BMSF) for the establishment of a centre of respiratory excellence within Wits University's pulmonology department.

The department serves the Chris Hani Baragwanath, Charlotte Maxeke and the Helen Joseph hospitals. The BMSF has committed \$10m to addressing Aids-related cancers in southern Africa.

"There are very few families that have not been affected by cancer. But we also know that cancer can be conquered if treated and diagnosed early. But in many instances, like some of the patients that came in to this facility, the diagnosis was too late," she said.

In her budget speech early this year, Ramokgopa announced that the department would before the end of the current financial year launch a health and wellness promotion revolution.

“It can’t be business as usual. We need to push back the frontiers of illness and trauma in our communities. We shouldn’t just do this for the rich who can afford to be in oncology programmes and get incentives for buying healthy food. It must be for the benefits of all citizens in the country,” she said.

She added that the centre would assist in the gathering of data and knowledge about lung cancer “so we understand it more and understand what it responds to optimally and what interventions work best for which kinds of patients”.

The centre is also expected to play a significant role in the empowerment of society about cancer.

National Health Insurance

The MEC also used the event to urge the public to reflect on the National Health Insurance programme which is aimed to pool resources and share healthcare benefits.

“One story that inspires me about the UK is that our Netcare had to pack up and leave because they were not making a profit. Ordinary British citizens have access to quality public health.

“South Africa can also do it so that everybody can partner with the understanding that it was not for maximising returns. You get involved in health to enhance the quality of life,” she said.

The NHI, she said, aims to ensure the country could afford more state-of-the-art facilities similar to the Lung Laboratory which boasts diagnostic and therapeutic modern technology.

She added that the facility would not only benefit disadvantaged communities but every citizen.

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