

US health volunteers arrive in KZN

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MORE than 60 health professionals, including doctors, dentists and surgeons from the US and Malaysia, arrived in KwaZulu-Natal this week to work as volunteers in the public health sector for the next month.

Addressing the team last night, KwaZulu-Natal Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo admitted that his department was unable to provide an effective and patient-centred health care service to all those living in rural areas.

"We are glad that from the faraway land where you come from, you appreciate that the government, with all good intentions, cannot have all the solutions, and we want to thank you for volunteering your services," said Dhlomo.

While the American team consists of a mixed group of health professionals, the Malaysian team will focus on one area – training local health workers in the use and technique of the Tara Klamp circumcision tool.

The group of about 20 Malaysian doctors are expected to begin their training in the use of the device in Newcastle today before travelling around the province next week.

The head of the province's circumcision programme, Dr Sandile Tshabalala, said he expected the Malaysian team to carry out more than 300 circumcisions this week while training local health staff in the process.

Trial

The Tara Klamp has come under fire recently, with the Treatment Action Campaign and the Southern African HIV Clinicians Society calling for the device to be withdrawn, saying it was not safe and produced adverse effects among a small group of trial participants.

Tshabalala rejected the claims. "We performed more than 850 circumcisions in the province using the Tara Klamp and have not had a single adverse reaction. We are also questioning how the trial among this small group was performed, and are of the opinion that the people who carried the circumcisions out were not properly trained in the correct use of the Tara Klamp. How is it possible that we have had more than 850 procedures done with the device and have not had a single problem?"

Dhlomo also rejected calls for the Klamp to be withdrawn, saying his department is convinced that it is an effective tool for circumcision, especially on a mass scale.

"It's a fight between the East and West. If this device was from Europe or America, they would have no problems with it, but because it is from the East they are questioning its effectiveness," said Dhlomo, who challenged those critics to provide medical proof as to why the Klamp should not be used.

