



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



REMARKS BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL, DR SANDILE BUTHELEZI DURING THE INTERNATIONAL PHARMACEUTICAL FEDERATION (FIP) CONGRESS IN CAPE TOWN ICC

SUNDAY, 01 SEPTEMBER 2024

Programme Director

President of International Pharmaceutical Federation Congress, Mr Paul Sinclair,

Chief Executive Officer of International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) Congress, Dr Catherine Duggan,

Members of the International Pharmaceutical Federation Congress Bureau,

President and Executive Director of the Pharmaceutical Society of SA

Representatives of South African Pharmacy Council

Representatives of Independent Community Pharmacy Association

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Members of the media present

Let me start by conveying an apology on behalf of his Excellency as well as the Minister of Health, both of whom could not join us today.

Allow me, also, to take this opportunity to express my gratitude on behalf of South African government and the health sector at large to the

organisers for choosing our beautiful country to stage this international congress for the first time in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The pharmacy profession has a long history in South Africa, dating back to the early 17th century when the Europeans at the time showed a great interest in the medicinal plants used by the Khoi, an indigenous population in South Africa.

By 1807 there were nine licensed apothecaries at the Cape of English, Dutch, German or French nationality. In that year a proclamation was issued which established the Supreme Medical Committee who was tasked to check qualifications and license chemists and druggists. This proclamation gave apothecaries the exclusive right to dispense medicine and thus making it illegal for physicians to do so.

Since that time, the medical profession has undergone multiple reforms, which started in this very City of Cape Town. In 1883, a memorandum was submitted to the then Select Committee on Medical Reform, arguing for urgent medical reform.

This was followed by multiple reforms over time that enabled the pharmacy profession to grow and play an important role in strengthening the health system, including changes in law that allowed for the establishment of well-respected regulatory bodies such as the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority and the South African Pharmacy Council.

We pride ourselves in having a world class regulatory body, the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority, which has attained the

WHO Maturity Level 3 certification for vaccines, benchmarked against the WHO Global Benchmarking Tool. This demonstrates that we have a stable, well-functioning and integrated regulatory system to ensure the quality, safety, and efficacy of vaccines that SAHPRA registers.

Our statutory council for pharmacist, the SAPC, plays a key role in promoting universal health coverage by ensuring excellent and sustainable patient-centred pharmaceutical services by developing, enhancing and upholding acceptable norms and standards in all spheres of pharmacy.

Currently, in South Africa, we have over 17,000 registered pharmacists, most of whom qualified at one of the country's nine pharmacy schools and are working in the various sectors of pharmacy.

South Africa is also home to the mRNA vaccine technology transfer hub, consisting of Afrigen Biologics, the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) and Biovac, a South African vaccine producer.

This is an example of South Africa's research, development and manufacturing capabilities for medicines and vaccines.

We have a growing pharmaceutical manufacturing sector, and Pharmacies are generally located in the heart of local communities, making pharmacists one of the most easily accessible healthcare providers and in many cases the public's first point of care, providing the needed services, promoting health and improving public awareness of health priorities.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), an efficient health system anywhere in the world consists of six (6) building blocks. You may call them six pillars of Health if you wish. Pharmacists are the custodians of the second building block, access to essential medicines and other commodities, and also play an integral role in the other blocks to ensure the stability of the health system.

This Congress takes place few weeks after both Africa CDC and the WHO declared mpox as a public health emergency of continental and international concern. I want to assure you that in South Africa the mpox outbreak is currently under control, but that does not mean we should lower our guard because viruses are unpredictable as they mutate from time to time, and we live in a global community where people travel from one country to another on a daily basis.

As seen during the Covid-19 pandemic, pharmacists in all sectors played a significant role in responding to the pandemic, maintaining the delivery of critical health services to communities, promoting the non-pharmaceutical interventions and providing vaccination services and testing.

Pharmacists also have a very important and integral role in addressing vaccine hesitancy through the promotion of information and education of the public on the benefits of vaccines. Once again, we are confident that pharmacists will be integral to South Africa's response, by providing awareness and education to the public, curb the spread of misinformation and play a role in referring patients that may have the symptoms.

In 2001, the pharmacy profession was first commemorated on the health calendar. This important Congress takes place at the time when we commemorate Pharmacy Month, a campaign to promote rational medicine use awareness with the focus on providing quality health care. The campaign which originally which amongst others is meant to raise patient awareness on the vital role pharmacists can play in the community's healthcare and to improve communication between patients and pharmacists and pharmacy support personnel.

This year's Pharmacy Month theme 'Let's Talk about Vaccines', is based on the conviction that improving vaccination coverage and promoting a life-course approach to vaccination are global imperatives to which pharmacists can greatly contribute. This is a novel approach fitting the Innovation for Future Healthcare theme of the FIP Congress.

South Africa is proud and honoured to be the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa, since the inception of the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP), to host this prestigious event, under the theme Innovating for the future of health care.

This 82nd FIP Congress is held at an exciting time for South Africa, where the National Health Insurance Bill (NHI) has just recently been signed into law, a key milestone in the transformation of our health sector. The NHI initiative aims to rectify the gross inequalities of the past by restructuring the healthcare system to ensure that all South Africans, regardless of their financial means or where they live, have access to essential healthcare services.

So, as you deliberate in the next three days, let us be united in our determination to advance and achieve Universal Health Coverage, let us commit to continuing to contribute to better health outcomes in our respective role, let us soldier on in building strong and resilient public health systems that are better prepared and can respond to global health threats.

The agenda for this Conference is packed, with opportunities for one-on-one engagements and many interesting and stimulating sessions. Please make the most of your time together.

In conclusion I would like to wish all delegates here a fruitful constructive conference, I do hope that those of you visiting from abroad will have an opportunity to explore some of Cape Town's world class tourist attractions, including the Table Mountain.

I thank you