

## SA medical students graduate from Cuba

Minister in the Presidency, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, says the medical graduates from the Nelson Mandela-Fidel Castro (NMFC) programme in Cuba is a boost for the country's efforts to implement the National Health Insurance (NHI).



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“These 700 graduates will form a core part of our National Health Insurance and with the learnings from the Cuban system, they will assist in improving it,” said the Minister.

Dlamini Zuma was addressing a graduation ceremony at the Victoria de Giron Medical Institute in Cuba where 700 medical students, who took part in the NMFC programme, graduated on Wednesday.

The Minister delivered a vote of thanks on behalf of the South African government.

The programme was forged by Presidents Nelson Mandela and Fidel Castro in 1996 as part of the various bilateral agreements between South Africa and Cuba.

The graduation of the students comes as South Africa celebrates the Mandela Centenary.

The programme was established to address the over-concentration of health personnel in urban areas and in the exclusionary private sector; insufficient personnel who were also not in possession of the necessary training and the under-provision of health care in rural and peri-urban areas as well as informal settlements.

It links with South Africa's efforts to provide universal health care – regardless of economic standing – to all its citizens through the NHI.

Dlamini-Zuma said the group was the 17th intake of medical students since the start of the programme and the largest ever recorded.

"It could not have been easy thousands of kilometers away from home, where at times it may have felt like the journey would never end and perhaps was not worth your time and attention. Siyabonga (thank you)," she said.

Various Cuban Ministers, including those from the Health, Education and International Relations, attended the graduation.

Dlamini Zuma said South Africa could not have chosen a better partner to comprehensively address its challenges.

"Today, thanks to the help of partners such as the people of Cuba, these 700 graduates will join the army of 232,587 registered health professionals, of which 45,615 are medical practitioners and 12 997 are medical students," said the Minister.

She called on the young doctors to emulate the healers of Cuba when they implement quality health care, promotion, prevention and treatment, which are cardinal features of South Africa's health care system.

"To you today's graduates, I offer to you a reminder of what Jose Marti said: 'Talent is a gift that brings with it an obligation to serve the world, and not ourselves'. It should therefore be not in our making to serve self but rather selfless service should be in our DNA.

"Sow forward and plant the seeds of healing and services to the millions who are in desperate need in our country and on our continent," said Dlamini Zuma.

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