

SAMHS WORLD AIDS DAY- “Getting to Zero”

Written by L/Cpl Siphokazi Dlakamela, SAMHS Corp Comm.
Photos by Lt Sello Segone, A/Milmed Editor



Col McNally, OC SAMHS HQ with Col Van den Heever signing the memorial quilt

First observed in 1988, World AIDS Day began as a way to increase awareness of the disease and to support those affected by it, their families, communities and the entire world. It is also providing an opportunity to fight prejudice against people living with HIV, improve knowledge about the disease among the wider population. Each year there is one theme to address the campaign as from 01 December.

This year the theme is “Getting to Zero” of new HIV infections, discrimination and AIDS related deaths. For December 2011 to 2015 it has envisioned that different regions and groups will each chose one or the entire Zero’s that best address their situations. This theme was backed by the United Nations (UN) and it was announced by the Minister of Health, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi in South Africa. Lt Col Esther Mohale managed the programme and gave a background of the World AIDS Day.

South African Military Health Service (SAMHS) always stands firm behind the government’s initiatives. This year is no different, all SAMHS Units had different activities in remembrance of those who were lost in HIV&AIDS and later, a mass walk was arranged for all the SAMHS members.

The SAMHS HQ members (Servamus 1 and 2) also gathered in Kasteelpark where the SAMHS HQ Officer Commanding (OC) Col McNally lit the candle as a symbol of unity in fighting the HIV&AIDS. Cpln Malcom Pillay, in his scripture reading urged the members to bring hope to those infected and affected by the virus.

The guest speaker for the day Lt Col (Dr) Robert Netangaheni, the Clinical Associates Coordinator at University of Pretoria gave the back ground of the World AIDS day and the challenges of HIV &AIDS in the Department of Defence Force. “SAMHS is using more of the budget on the treatment and the management of the individual infected with HIV or who have AIDS. This type of workload needs mental maturity of all health care providers and maintaining confidentiality”, he informed the members during his address.

The Memorial Quilt was signed by all the members who attended as a way of remembering those who affected by HIV & AIDS. Later on, all SAMHS members from the Generals, senior officers to the most junior members gathered at Military Health Training Formation (MHTF) to embark on a mass walk around Thaba Tshwane. All different units have their own banners during the walk with inspiring messages on.



The Surgeon General, Lt Gen Veejaynand Ramlakan in track suits with Deputy SG, Maj Gen Lourens Smith (behind SG)

The Surgeon General, Lt Gen Veejaynand Ramlakan led from the front with his deputy Maj Gen Lourens Smith when participated during the mass walk. Maj Gen Smith thanked everyone who came to ensure the success of the campaign. After all has been said and done, the big question is “With all the educational programmes on awareness and prevention at schools, why do we have such alarming statistics?”, Dr Netangaheni posed a rhetoric question in his address.

It all comes down to me and you to take a step towards *Getting to Zero* of new HIV infections, discrimination and AIDS related deaths. It is everyone’s responsibility to fight HIV&AIDS; it’s not the government’s alone.