



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

Keynote Address by

Hon. Dr. Richard Nchabi Kamwi

Minister of Health and Social Services

**On the 12th Polytechnic HIV/AIDS & Alcohol
Awareness Campaign**

Polytechnic of Namibia, Windhoek

13 May 2008

Program Director, Ms. Frieda Shimbuli, Dean of Students
The Rector of the Polytechnic, Dr. Tjama Tjivikua
The Vice Rector, Finance & Administration, Dr. Gert Gunzel
The Management and Staff of the Polytechnic of Namibia
Distinguished invited guests
Members of the media
Dear Students
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am indeed very pleased for the opportunity to address you this morning, on the occasion of the 12th Polytechnic of Namibia (PON) Alcohol and HIV/AIDS awareness campaign. I am particularly delighted that I address you so soon after the first National HIV Testing Day (NTD) which was a resounding success. I do hope that some of you participated in the NTD activities and witnessed for yourselves the overwhelming response by Namibians from all walks of life.

Distinguished guests

The linkages between alcohol abuse and the spread of HIV/AIDS are real, and addressing the challenges posed is essentially a demand for responsible and conscientious living. These two challenges are devastating in their own rights, and much more so when taken together. Our overall aim here during this campaign must be to recognize that alcohol misuse is a major public health problem with devastating socio-economic consequences. Equally, to recognize that HIV/AIDS remains a devastating epidemic, which is cutting lives short, jeopardising the futures of many innocents, and hampering development.

Programme Director

The Scriptures speak to these issues, and I want to be precise, in Proverbs 23:21, I quote “*for the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.*” Similarly, in Ecclesiastics 10:17 “*...eat for strength and not for drunkenness*”. This is to say, when the Lord created the earth, He created it with plenty and for the benefit of His children to be used in moderation. Unfortunately, over time some men have become greedy and consume most things in excess. In reality anything taken in excess, in this case alcohol, can have negative results.

The effects of the abuse of alcohol misuse, its overindulgence and irresponsible use, are harmful to our children and the future of our societies. Alcohol abuse, spurred by cheap and easy availability of liquor, is directly correlated to crime property damage, public disorder and assault. Indeed harmful alcohol consumption is a major cause of a high proportion of illness and premature deaths.

For example, a research study on Alcohol and Drug Abuse carried out by the Ministry of Health and Social Services in 2002 revealed that 52% of adult Namibians drink alcohol, and 8% suffer from alcohol related illnesses. It is clear that alcohol consumption is taken by all, across the board. Indeed, alcoholism, which leads to woes and tribulations, affects people across generations, educated or not, whether they are employed or not, whether they live in the city or in rural areas, and right through economic and political classes.

Moreover, the study revealed that 50% of Namibian youth (aged 13-16) have experimented with alcohol; 17% of young males and 10% of young females in this age group were found to consume alcohol on a regular basis. As you are aware, alcohol dulls the senses and impairs one’s judgement.

The fact that Namibians are consuming alcohol in their youth, a most impressionable, promising, and productive time in their lives, is most worrisome.

Alcohol abuse contributes to a wide range of social and health problems, including depression, injuries, cancer, cirrhosis, dependency, family disruption and loss of productivity. It often leads to fights, domestic violence and even murder. Numerous studies revealed that alcohol abuse is a direct factor in the abuse and rape of women and children, even in their own homes. Furthermore, alcohol abuse leads to violent crimes, leads people to have unprotected and often promiscuous sex, or even deliberately infecting others with HIV. We must therefore seek redress to this situation as a matter of urgency.

In this regard, we remain grateful that the alcohol/beverage industry has come to realise the adverse effects of the inappropriate and unsafe use of the commodity they produce and sell. While recognising the positive contributions of this sector to the socio-economic development of our country through employment and income generation, we must remain mindful of the need to promote responsible and moderate consumption of alcohol among adults, and to strictly enforce the non-consumption of alcohol by minors.

Indeed, this redress must involve all relevant parties, as is evidenced here today at the Polytechnic as a representative of the education sector.

Programme Director

I was pleased to learn of the HIV prevalence survey conducted by Polytechnic and Pharm-access. This survey sought to quantify the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate amongst students; to determine the knowledge, beliefs and attitudes towards HIV/AIDS.

Furthermore, the survey sought to discover personal and social practices students engage in that could make them susceptible to contracting HIV.

I have been informed that the results of the survey reveal that HIV prevalence amongst students at Polytechnic is 2.82%. The survey further indicated that, in terms of knowledge about HIV/AIDS, 96% of students showed an appreciation for the difference between HIV and AIDS, and 96% of students demonstrated an understanding of what sexually transmitted diseases are. As regards attitudes and practices towards HIV/AIDS, 40% of students indicated that they would kiss a person who is HIV positive, 17% would eat food prepared by a person who is HIV positive, and 95% were willing to attend lectures with a person who is HIV positive.

While some of these figures are encouraging, it is important to continue to create a fuller understanding of the epidemic, its drivers, and ways to mitigate its impacts and prevent its spread.

We know that the first HIV infection was reported in Namibia in 1986. By March 2007, there were about 195,000 Namibians living with the HIV infection. Regrettably, since then many Namibians have died of AIDS related causes since then. Indeed, approximately 7,100 Namibians died of AIDS related causes last year alone. This is indeed a significant number and is a cause of much concern to us all.

I share this information with you not to overwhelm you with the gravity of this epidemic, but to motivate you to reflect on your own knowledge of HIV/AIDS and to transform your attitudes and actions in line with the national response to curb this disease.

Young people, those aged between 15-35 years of age, remain the most susceptible to HIV/AIDS. Interestingly, however, it is also this group that has the largest capacity to curb the spread of the disease. It is therefore very important that young people should be the main focus of AIDS and alcohol prevention programmes. This campaign could not have come at a more opportune time, following the National HIV Testing Day on May 9, where so many young people reaffirmed their commitment to the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Programme Director

Dear Students

This alcohol and HIV/AIDS awareness week aims to increase the knowledge and build the capacity of the student body to advance the professional lives of young people in Namibia while ensuring that they remain conscientious of their health and wellbeing, and that of society at large.

As the saying goes, “Knowledge is power”; indeed, the more you know the more you are able to do to protect and care for yourselves and your loved ones. I sincerely believe that this Campaign can serve as an effective forum for disseminating information on HIV/AIDS and alcohol if each one of us takes to heart the deliberations. I challenge each one of you to match your learning about with equal action.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Considering the numerous activities/initiatives on the subject of HIV/AIDS and alcohol abuse organised by various institutions including the Polytechnic of Namibia (PON), it is clear that more and more Namibians are aware of the dangers of alcohol abuse, the scourge of HIV/AIDS, and indeed the ways in which alcohol abuse contributes to the spread of HIV.

Given this background I wish to commend the organisers of this very important awareness campaign; together our intended objective should be the promotion of good health and a sound well-being for all. Indeed, I remain grateful to the efforts of the leadership of the PON, led by its visionary Rector and his able Dean of Students, to educate and empower our young students in particular in the national fight against HIV/AIDS and alcohol abuse. Let us never underestimate the role of youth and the importance of education.

The Polytechnic provides an excellent model of these two critical features of our national development. I commend the leadership of the Polytechnic of Namibia for the steadfastness and unity of purpose with which you discharge your mandate as an institution set to translate natural and technological sciences into concrete skills. These sciences are the foundation upon which careers in development such as medicine, nursing, teaching and engineering, are built, and through which we can achieve the goals enshrined in our Vision2030. As we forge ahead with the development of our country, we must accept that development is impossible without peace and is dependent upon education.

Therefore I call on all learners here to maintain an active interest and dedication to your studies. Equally, I urge you to take sincere care and exercise responsibility in your personal and social lives. Treat yourselves and your counterparts with the respect, dignity and care that you all deserve. These were some of the principles we fought so hard for as part of the liberation of our country, and that we hope to bequeath to future generations. The effect of alcohol abuse and HIV/AIDS warrants serious attention from all of us. Let us unite in our concerted efforts to eradicate them from our society.

Thank you.