

# New medical post celebrated

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KZN Health MEC Sibongiseni Dhlomo, right, congratulates Sabelo Ngcobo for graduating as a clinical associate !! one of the first in the country to do so. The new graduates will be sent to rural areas to ease the medical skills shortage.

A new health job, that of clinical associate, was launched in KwaZulu-Natal this week by the Health Department, eight years after it was first mooted by the late national minister of health, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang.

The position is aimed at easing the country's shortage of health professionals.

The department also introduced the seven KwaZulu-Natal graduates of the new Bachelor of Clinical Medical Practice degree. They have been deployed to the Hlabisa, Ceza, Mosvold, Charles Johnson Memorial, Greytown and Osindisweni hospitals.

The seven were part of a group of 47 clinical associates who graduated from the University of Pretoria, Walter Sisulu University and the University of the Witwatersrand. Their three years of study were funded by the government.

Clinical associates are registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa.

KZN Health MEC Sibongiseni Dhlomo said Tshabalala-Msimang had been inspired by the clinical associate programme in the US.

She was part of a team Tshabalala-Msimang sent to America to research how to deal with the doctor shortage... which is where we saw this programme.

To honour her legacy Dhlomo said he would introduce the Manto Tshabalala-Msimang Award for the best performing clinical associate.

He said that, unfortunately, the University of KwaZulu-Natal had rejected the concept when it had been introduced, which was why only seven clinical associates from the province had graduated. Had UKZN run with the programme there would have been more graduates, Dhlomo said.

This province needs more clinical associates because it has a high number of rural hospitals with shortages of doctors, he said.

UKZN was now reconsidering offering the programme. Those eligible needed Grade 12 maths and science.

UKZN spokeswoman Nomonde Mbadi said the university was working internally to have the programme accredited. Once these processes were complete the programme would be submitted to the Department of Higher Education and Training, the Council for Higher Education and the Health Professions Council of South Africa for accreditation.

Tshabalala-Msimang's daughter, Zukiswa Tshabalala, a lecturer and co-ordinator of the programme at the University of Pretoria, said another 87 students would graduate in December . 13 from KZN.