

Pregnancy Awareness Week in Ekurhuleni

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Many people regard pregnancy as one of the hardest times due to the many different things the foetus demands and the changes to the body of the mother. The Department of Health in the City of Ekurhuleni (on the Eastrand of Gauteng) has rolled out this programme to help make the gestation period bearable for mothers-to-be and to help reduce the number of deaths of foetuses every year.

From 10 to 16 February 2022 the City of Ekurhuleni hosted daily workshops at several public hospitals (including Katlehong North Hospital, Bertha Gxowa Hospital and Benoni Hospital), for pregnant women to learn more about their pregnancy. This programme, called Pregnancy Awareness Week, was put into motion as a support to the community. In some parts of the City, the Health Department introduced an online programme to help new mothers keep track of their pregnancy (first trimester, second trimester and third trimester) and the health of their baby.

A pack with a monitoring book was also provided to the women who attended the week-long workshop, so that they can track and study the behaviour of the child (such as kicking and other healthy movement in the womb) and record it. This helps keep a clear record of the baby's health. According to the Health Department, texts will also be sent to the mothers-to-be to remind them of their appointments at the clinics or health centres. This programme is believed to be the easiest way to detect pregnancy complications at the earliest convenience.

The pregnancy awareness programme was also put in place to help women maintain a healthy lifestyle which promotes a healthy pregnancy. This healthy lifestyle includes eating healthy food, getting enough sleep and staying in a clean environment. This also promotes a healthy mind. The women were also urged to avoid activities that will tire them out because this may lead to complications.

Other important information that was shared with the women who attended include their rights during pregnancy which includes the right to ask her doctor questions and also get explanations about her condition. This right enables pregnant women to understand what they need to do and helps them have a healthy relationship with the child before it's born. This right also creates a sober relationship between the woman and her doctor and this creates a safe environment for women.

Many women have however felt that they can not always exercise this right due to the disrespectful treatment by some health officials, who often neglect pregnant women who come to clinics and hospitals for check-ups or seeking treatment. Speaking to a former assistant nurse based in the Germiston area, a number of women have complained about last minute changes to their chosen way of giving birth (birth plan), for reasons unknown to them. Many women have been forced to have unplanned cesarean sections, despite natural births being possible. Often health officials do not want to wait for the process of dilation to happen naturally

because it can take much longer, and this means many women undergo unnecessary and even dangerous procedures.

Other rights are often neglected too; like the right to maternity leave, which has proved to be the cause of some of the issues women face. While some are denied this right completely; others are overworked to make up for the time they were away or when they will be away for maternity leave. This right is also linked to Section 187 of the Labour Relations Act which states that you cannot be retrenched or dismissed for any reason related to your pregnancy and you cannot be dismissed while on maternity leave.

This directly supports the right that women must be treated with respect, dignity and confidentiality. A lot of women are not familiar with these rights, hence they face many problems in their workplaces. This is why it is very important for women to stay informed at all times.

Although the programme ended on 16 February, the participants were urged to pass on the information they learnt through teaching each other and referring each other to the right facilities where they will get the right education.

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