

Remarks by Minister of Health

Hon. Dr. Fenton Ferguson

Church Service – Jamaica Health Forum Diaspora Canada

Apple Creek Seventh Day Adventist Church

700 Apple Creek Boulevard, Markham

Saturday, July 12, 2014 at 11:00a.m – 1:00 p.m.

Salutations

I am grateful for this opportunity for fellowship. In all that we do we have to make time to express our thanks to that mightier force than ourselves in whom all things are possible. I congratulate the organisers of the Jamaican Health Forum Diaspora Canada for the successful staging of the event this past week. We have had fruitful discussions and I am confident that this meeting of the minds will bring increased value to the health sector in Jamaica which will no doubt benefit Jamaicans and Jamaica.

As we move towards achieving our National Development Goals outlined in Vision 2030, great strides have been made especially in the areas of primary health care, infrastructure improvement of the health sector, the implementation of the National Health Information System Strategic Plan, improvements in the delivery of pharmacy services, improved efficiencies across the health sector, increased access to services and the move towards universal health coverage.

However, we face numerous challenges. Jamaica like many other vulnerable economies faces a challenge to adequately finance healthcare. This, in an environment in which the porosity of our borders, global travel and international trade, exacerbate the risks associated with the spread of communicable diseases.

We are on the verge of an introduction of chikungunya virus for example, which can greatly affect our ability to provide services to our clients as it will put a strain on the resources of the health sector. Chikungunya is now in 25 countries in the Caribbean Region with about 250,000 cases recorded in total. Chikungunya is also one of those diseases which results in chronic pain and can prevent persons from attending school and work for up to 2-3 years. Immediately you can appreciate how this will affect the overall productivity of the country. We know from the experience of other islands that we can expect our health system to be under considerable strain and there may be temporary disruptions in our economy and tourism sector once the disease is introduced into Jamaica. We will need all hands on deck, not if, but when chikungunya is introduced in Jamaica and the support of everyone including the members of the Diaspora for us to be able to adequately manage the repercussions that will come.

We are also challenged by the high prevalence of non-communicable diseases in the country. Ladies and gentlemen, non-communicable diseases are an epidemic and a major cause of death and disability in Jamaica. According to the World Health report in 2008, globally, 63% of deaths or 36 million are due to NCDs mainly cardiovascular diseases, cancers, diabetes and chronic

respiratory diseases. Nearly 80% of these deaths occurred in low and middle-income countries like Jamaica.

In the Region of the Americas, three out of four persons die as a result of NCDs; of which 74% of deaths occur in the Caribbean. In Jamaica four major diseases – cancers, diabetes, chronic respiratory illnesses and cardiovascular diseases accounted for 70% of all deaths in 2010. The Ministry of Health has in place the National Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs in Jamaica 2013 to 2018. This strategic plan reviews the burden of NCDs in Jamaica and sets out a plan of action to address the problem through five major priority areas:

- Risk factor reduction and health promotion
- Integrated disease management and self-management education
- Surveillance, monitoring and evaluation and research
- Public policy, advocacy and communication
- And programme management

Another major aspect of the plan is the partnerships that we are forging and the engagement of members of every community including other Governments, NGOs, the Church and the Diaspora. We have already made several contacts in keeping with our Cancer Plan which is a subset, albeit major part, of the NCD plan.

- We have a Memorandum of Understanding with Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre to develop systems of cancer care, emergency pre-hospital care, trauma and emergency medicine and chronic disease management.
- We have a Memorandum of Understanding with “Sick Kids” Hospital to strengthen the delivery of cancer care to children.
- The Vincent HoSang Family Foundation has gotten on board with assisting us to purchase two Linear Accelerator (LINAC) machines. I am pleased to note that Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre will assist us in the preparation for the commissioning of these machines once received.
- We are in the process of signing an MOU with Columbia University and
- We have signed a second MOU with Chain of Hope, UK

We have also been fortunate enough to host numerous Medical Missions especially to boost the delivery of services at the primary care level. In 2012 for example, we hosted 172 Medical Missions and saw savings of \$537,000 for pharmaceuticals and in 2013 we hosted 197 Missions with savings for pharmaceuticals and other medications amounting to about \$990,000.

We have 24 public hospitals and over 300 primary health care facilities to provide care for a population of 2.8 million. So the constraints are great. We recognise that we cannot achieve our objective to drastically improve the health of the people of Jamaica in furtherance of our National Development Goals without the assistance of these groups and others including members of the Diaspora.

Jamaica is moving towards building the health sector in line with the National Strategies outlined in Vision 2030. These include strengthening the responsiveness of the health system to diseases, improving the health promotion approach, providing and maintaining adequate health infrastructure, emphasizing the primary health care approach and introducing a programme for sustainable financing of health care. We cannot achieve these objectives without forging meaningful partnerships.

We strongly believe in the value of partnerships to move the health sector forward. Through these partnerships we can improve efficiency of the sector, acquire much needed supplies and equipment and broaden access to services to Jamaicans. I hope that after today we will have an even closer relationship with the Diaspora. The Ministry has been putting systems in place to ensure that this happens and that we can work together in a more efficient and meaningful way. This is the only way that we will achieve the Vision 2030 object of a healthy and stable population and making Jamaica the place of choice to live, work, raise families and do business.

Thank you.