

Spiritual, Mental Health and Social Stigmatisation

Good evening to our beloved listeners and viewers at home who are watching and listening on different social media platforms and radio stations. Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to my weekly show known as “The talk with the Speaker of Council”.

I would love to take this opportunity to welcome you all, including our radio partners Jozi FM, Eldos FM, Alex FM and Chai FM, my co-anchor Mr Colin Hans, as well as all our panel of experts, who will be leading the discussion for this evening’s dialogue.

We are live on various platforms and encourage you to follow the discussion on the City of Johannesburg’s facebook page, as well as my own social media page which is “**Nonceba Molwele**” on Facebook and **@Speaker_CoJ** on Twitter.

Today we are discussing “**Spirituality, Mental Health, and social stigmatisation**”.

Mental Health Awareness remains a very important topic that we can never have enough awareness on. Although the general perception of mental illness has improved over the past decades, studies show that stigma against mental illness is still powerful, largely due to media stereotypes and lack of education, and that people tend to attach negative stigmas to mental health conditions at a far higher rate than to other diseases and disabilities, such as cancer, diabetes or heart disease.

We must continue to priorities the awareness of disorders like depression and anxiety, schizophrenia and others, because if we don’t the consequences can be dire. A case in point being the matter of the late Ma Josina

By discussing mental illnesses, we are hoping to increase the understanding about the topic within our communities, to create acceptance and so that those who live with mental illness feel supported.

We must also avoid the unpalatable repeat of what happened to the late dear Mama Josina Sangwena. Gogo Sangweni was living with schizophrenia, she was a mental health patient and she was also a traditional healer. She was attacked because community members mistakened her behaviour for witchcraft, so much so that they burnt her alive. Ladies and gentlemen this is appalling, and we really need to do better as a society.

It is for this reason that I want to probe further around this subject, and particularly bring in the element of spirituality as it relates to mental health. We now know that in some instances some people who have the ancestral calling present very similarly with psychotic behaviour or depression and or bipolar. It could've been that Mama Sangweni was one such case.

However I have the experts the room to unpack this for us, and as let me start by introducing:

1. Dr Fundile Nyati. You may know him as our Civic Education Partner, but today he is part of our panel. He is a medical Doctor, a qualified specialist and family physician. He is also the found of Proactive Health Solutions. Dr Nyati welcome to the platform. Welcome Bhele.
2. Warm greetings to Gogo Bakhombisile Maseko, who is the National Coordinator for the Traditional Healers Organization. Thank you for joining us Gogo Maseko we appreciate your presence.
3. Gogo Ramphelane Moruthanyane who is also a Traditional Health Practitioner from the Traditional Healers Organisation, Welcome Gogo Moruthanyane, and thank you for joining us this evening.
4. Ms Sylvia Stevens who is a Social Worker and a representative of the Johannesburg Faith Based Organisation. Welcome Sis Sylvia, we appreciate your presence.

Before I hand over to Mr Colin Hans who is my co-anchor as per usual, let me begin with Dr Nyati. Dr Nyati, as a medical practitioner please help us understand what exactly is mental health and take us through the symptoms of somebody with a calling and perhaps differentiate it from the medical condition of schizophrenia and other mental health problems.

Questions to ask as the show progresses on the topic:

1. Like Doc says, society finds it difficult to differentiate between a calling and somebody who is medical unsound, what are the observations made by Traditional Health Practitioners as it relates to mental health. (Gogo Maseko)
2. What are the dangers of social stigmatisation of people, but especially Traditional Health Practitioners (Ms Silvia Stevens)
3. How can society and traditional health practitioners work together in combating stigmatisation of those who are mentally unwell (Gogo Moruthanyane)
4. What are the interventions that can be employed for persons living with mental health and how can families and society offer support to those living with a mental health condition (Ms Sylvia Stevens)
5. Does counselling or psychotherapy cure mental health (Dr Nyati)
6. How can families support persons living with mental health (Gogo Maseko / Dr Nyati or Ms Stevens)

Conclusion:

Thank you to our listeners and viewers at home who took the time to watch and listen and thank you for your engagements on different social media platforms and radio stations for broadcasting live this evenings topic. And big thank you to our panel guest for your wisdom shared. We shall meet again next week Wednesday for another graceful topic engagement.