



health

Department:  
Health  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

To: Editors & Health Journalists  
Issued by: National Department of Health  
Date: Friday, 19 April 2024

### **Statement by Health Minister on the state of public health service in SA**

#### **Violent Incidences at the Themba Regional Hospital, Mpumalanga**

**Pretoria:** Minister of Health, Dr Joe Phaahla notes with concern and condemns in strong terms the acts of anarchy, violence and criminality targeting healthcare facilities with the intention to disrupt the provision of essential health services, depriving patients of life-saving treatment.

The recent acts of violence committed in Themba Hospital in Mpumalanga which threatened the safety and security of the health workers, patients, service providers and infrastructure is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. These acts disrupt the provision of essential health services, threaten the safety and security of health workers, patients, and health infrastructure.

We welcome the swift response and interventions by members of the South African Police Service and other law enforcement agencies to normalise the situation to enable the health workers to perform their life-saving duties in a safe and protected environment without disruption and acts of violence, and at the same time enable the patients to access essential health service including life-saving treatment.

The government will continue to respond proportionally to these criminal acts to protect those who need help in the hospital, the healthcare workers and the healthcare infrastructure we have. We are already working with the South African Police Service (SAPS) to ensure that healthcare service continues uninterrupted and prevent future incidences. We want to assure the healthcare workers and community at large that

the similar acts will not happen unattended and will be responded with speed and appropriately.

The National Department of Health (NDOH) and the South African Police Service (SAPS) have signed Memorandum of Agreement in 2019, at which have committed to cooperate to ensure security and safety of patients, workers in the health facility and the entire infrastructure. The SAPS in response to criminality in the health facility will deploy a dedicated team to ensure security of the facility.

We call upon anyone with evidence of unethical behaviour by health officials or concerns about the level of service delivery, operations of the health facility or whatsoever, to raise them through proper channels instead of resorting to violence and intimidation because that will not be tolerated, and the law will take its course.

We will not entertain any form of anarchy and feeling of entitlement in our facilities because we follow normal procurement processes like any other public institution. We implore people to exercise their constitutional rights to protest peacefully within the confines of the law, without infringing the rights to life by others and access to healthcare.

We can confirm that no life has been lost in the facility due to the recent unfortunate violent incidents, but a number of patients couldn't access their chronic medication, while some planned surgeries had to be rescheduled. Other patients were transferred to nearby hospitals, while stable patients were discharged. The situation is now under control and the hospital is fully operational. Staff members are back at work.

### **Human Resources for Health**

The Department of Health continues with efforts to address the challenge of unemployment of health professionals, including medical doctors who completed statutory community service programme. We are working closely with Provincial health departments focused on all critical vacant posts to strengthen healthcare delivery to adequately respond to the needs of our people. We are making progress in the recruitment of the qualified health professionals across the country. Let me dispel the myths by some critics and allay fears that the department is dragging its feet to recruit and appoint unemployed health professionals.

There are 2012 unfunded vacant posts of medical doctors on the health sector establishment at the current moment across nine provinces which require R2,4 billion to fill them. This number excludes other categories of health professionals like nurses, pharmacists, radiographers, dentists et cetera. We are happy to announce that a total of 2066 health professionals have been appointed between January and March 2024 across the country.

This consists of 1121 medical officers on Grade 1 of entry level, 579 professional nurses, 127 Allied Health workers, 100 pharmacists, 91 Radiographers, 23 Dentists Grade 1 and 9 Environmental Health Officers. The recruitment processes are continuing in provinces to finalize more appointments scheduled to enable the successful candidates to assume duties in May 2024.

The Ministry continues to work closely with the provincial Health MECs to activate unfunded vacant posts using the allocated additional budget to enable recruitment of more health workers. It is our wish to employ as many health professionals as possible to play a meaningful role in the public health system of the country. It is important to emphasize that the filling of posts is done in line with the employment guidelines as issued by the Department of Public Service and Administration. This means the applicants should not limit themselves to the provinces or districts of their residence.

### **Cholera Update**

The country has recorded more than 150 suspected cholera cases, 12 laboratory-confirmed cases and one death between 1 January and 18 April 2024. Eleven of these cases were recorded in Limpopo and one in Gauteng. Three of these cases are imported from Zimbabwe, with no definite history of contact with other confirmed cases. The deceased patient was a 48-year-old male South African citizen from Musina, in Vhembe District who experienced diarrhoeal symptoms and was admitted in hospital on 16 March, unfortunately he passed away on 21 March 2024 in Pietersburg hospital.

The risk of both imported cases and local transmission remains high due the cross-border movements to and from both Zimbabwe and Mozambique. We appeal to the organisers of social gatherings including religious and traditional events to ensure strict compliance with personal hygiene (including handwashing) especially during food preparation and serving, and ablution facilities to prevent possible transmission of cholera and other foodborne and waterborne diseases.

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