

KZN Health's jobs freeze an 'attack on lives' - Denosa

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KZN Health's jobs freeze an 'attack on lives' - Denosa By Mervyn Naidoo Feb 7, 2022 Share this article: [Share](#)[Tweet](#)[Share](#)[Share](#)[Share](#)[Email](#)[Share](#) A cash-strapped KZN Department of Health (DOH) has devised a turnaround plan, which includes an immediate moratorium on jobs, halting infrastructure maintenance projects and the procurement, servicing and repair of medical equipment, to keep their heads above water. But employees, labour unions and some political parties have rejected the plan and claimed such cost-cutting measures were an "attack on human lives". It has been widely reported that long waits for service, overworked medical staff and crumbling infrastructure are commonplace at various public healthcare facilities around the province. Earlier this week, a provincial health portfolio committee, based on information they received, went on a fact finding mission to the Northdale Hospital in Pietermaritzburg. Their trip became necessary following allegations of major infrastructure challenges, including leaking roofs and patients sleeping on floors. With the country bleeding jobs at a rapid rate due to the tough economic climate, more people were relying on already overburdened public health facilities for their medical needs, was another concern of the department's detractors. A senior official in the KZN DOH penned the cost containment plan, which was circulated last month. It stated that, in November, the KZN DOH reviewed its standing for the current financial year, which ends on March 31, and realised that, based on their spending trajectory, their overspending would go beyond R2.1billion. Even after receiving an allocation of R2.2bn and doing a re-analysis in December, the department estimated their overspending would reach R1.1bn. The plan was to ensure

they remained within their allocated budget until the end of the financial term. Compensation of employees, laboratory services, medicines, medical supplies, property payments and machinery and equipment, were listed as among their main cash pressure points. The plan detailed when the various categories of maintenance infrastructure projects could possibly be reactivated, including the procurement, servicing and repair of medical equipment. But no time frame for the lifting of the jobs moratorium was set. Sibonelo Cele, the provincial chairman of the Democratic Nursing Organisation of SA (Denosa) said they were disappointed by the plan and feared its consequences. "This is an attack on human lives because people will die due to the lack of nurses," said Cele. He questioned whether the department had a proper human resources (HR) plan, and if they had one, why weren't they adhering to it. Cele claimed their HR suggestions were ignored in the past. "Now that they are in a crisis, they want us to accept this. We won't," he said. Dr Angelique Coetzee, spokesperson for the South African Medical Association, also confirmed her organisation rejected the jobs moratorium. "It is wrong not to replace, not in healthcare. "One only has to look at the patient load at hospitals or clinics to know that it is wrong," she said. Coetzee recommended that if doctors and other competent medical staff were hired, money spent on medical negligence claims and legal fees would be saved. Claude Naiker, the Public Servants Association's national manager, appealed to the KZN DOH to lift the moratorium to "prevent the collapse of our health system". Naiker found it unacceptable that instead of putting measures in place to halt the department's continuing trend of irregular expenditure, it has frozen vacancies. He was referring to the latest Auditor-General's report which showed irregular expenditure of nearly R1.7bn in . "We demand full accountability on the causes of irregular expenditure, consequences management be applied against those who are at fault, by continuously disregarding prescribed Treasury and supply chain regulations," he said. Naiker believed that the department was abusing its power to halt the filling of budgeted vacancies, without proper consultation with affected bodies. Dr Rishigen Viranna, a DA member of the provincial legislature and their health spokesperson, blamed the department's budgetary woes "corruption and mismanagement". Viranna made reference to the AG highlighting that one of the reasons for the department receiving a qualified audit finding was due to a lack of management and leadership. "The plan includes the non-filling of all posts. This, despite the Auditor-General reporting that the rise in medico-legal cases against the department was due to a lack of staff. "Their medico-legal case load has doubled in the latest financial year at almost R25 billion. A moratorium on filling posts is the last thing the department should be doing," said Viranna. Thokozile Gumede, the IFP's health portfolio committee member and chairwoman of the party's Women's Brigade in KZN, believed the plan

was “a disaster in the making”. Gumede was among the delegation that visited Northdale Hospital, where she noted “staff and infrastructure was a huge challenge”. “Healthcare is a science. Therefore, you must always upscale and come up with new plans,” she said. Gumede predicted there would be an even greater demand for “psychiatric care”, considering the country’s economic struggles and the devastating Covid-19 impacts. Gumede said Nomagugu Simelane, KZN’s health MEC, was an educated legal woman, but had no medical background, which hampered her decision-making. “Being advised is good, but you need to have your own input, ideas, instincts, expertise and knowledge. “We have questioned this from the outset,” said Gumede. Ntokozo Maphisa, spokesperson for the KZN DOH said: “The cost-containment measures that the department has embarked on are part of a responsible and proactive approach through which future fiscal challenges will be averted. “There is no crisis. In fact, there is a contingency plan in place to minimise the impact of these austerity measures and ensure continuity,” he said. Maphisa was confident that the plan would enable the department to meet its financial obligations and a number of savings and objectives would be realised in the future. Regarding Simelane’s performance, Maphisa said: “The MEC’s strong leadership, management qualities and innovative approach to governance speak for themselves. “Her unwavering crusade to improve the level of healthcare service delivery across the province and her tireless efforts aimed at saving lives during the Covid-19 pandemic have been there for all to see. “Therefore, we will not allow shallow political opportunists to erode her sterling performance through unwarranted personal attacks,” he said.

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