

Feedback: PHSDSBC

Provision of transport for health workers during COVID-19 pandemic

It was previously reported that with the lockdown in March 2020, labour requested the employer to provide transport to frontline health workers. Labour wanted frontline workers to be protected from being infected with COVID-19 while commuting in public transport. A collective agreement on the provision of transport to frontline health workers was drafted but the employer failed to secure a reasonable mandate to implement its provisions. As a result of the second wave and the increase of infections amongst frontline health workers, labour re-introduced this agenda item. Labour insisted that the employer must consider the health and safety of these workers as the virus was spreading rapidly. Labour requested that the employer reviews its mandate on the provision of transport and provide labour with feedback as a matter of urgency. The employer noted labour's submission and committed to re-submit the inputs to its principals to review the mandate on the provision of transport to frontline workers. At that stage the employer was to provide feedback at the next Council meeting, which is scheduled for 28 October 2021. Unfortunately, the employer was not willing to enter into a collective agreement and subsequently indicated that this matter will be monitored at institutional level and will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. This will be monitored on a provincial level.

Token of appreciation

Labour registered frustration and disappointment with the employer for failing to provide a token of appreciation to frontline health workers. Labour felt that the employer did not take the plight of these workers seriously. The efforts of these workers deserved a token of appreciation such as tax relief or danger allowance, etc. The employer promised at the last Council meeting to finalise the matter and implement accordingly. The employer at that stage indicated that the consultation process with relevant stakeholders was at the final phase and that it would provide concrete feedback at the next Council meeting that is scheduled for 28 October 2021. The employer reported that they are still busy with its mandating process and will pronounce at the next Council meeting, which is scheduled for 28 October 2021.

Standardisation: Remuneration and conditions of service for Community Health Workers (CHWs) - Department of Health

Parties to the Council resolved to prioritise the standardisation of the remuneration and the conditions of CHWs in the Department of Health. Unfortunately, the provisions as contained in clause 5.5 of Resolution 1/2018 have once again not been finalised and further engagements are required to address and finalise the specific issues as stipulated in clause 5.5. Clause 5.5 of the Resolution stipulates that, “**parties to ensure the development of Standard Operational Procedure for the recruitment, selection, appointment, placement, remuneration, skills development, dispute resolution, occupational health and safety processes and the absorption into the health system for CHWs and the subsequent process that may follow in line with policy framework and strategy for ward-based outreach**”.

Members will recall that a collective agreement was signed, extending the lifespan of PHSDSBC Resolution 1/2018 for two consecutive terms. The employer tabled a draft agreement to extend the lifespan once again with a further 12 months to allow parties to conclude on outstanding matters as per clause 5.5 above. The current lifespan of the agreement expired on 10 July 2021. A collective agreement was subsequently signed by parties to extend the contracts of CHWs until 10 July 2022.

Amendment of Clause 4.1.1 and 4.2.2 of PHSDSBC Resolution 2/2017 (Framework agreement on payment of rural allowance and amendment of occupational-specific dispensation (OSD) for Social Service professionals and occupations)

During the last Council meeting, a presentation was made on the topic. It was agreed that Social Development will provide a response to the presentation and it has subsequently done so. Clause 4.1.1 of the agreement stipulates that, within ten days from the date of this agreement, the employer will table a proposed model on Rural Allowance at the Council, for eligible Social Service professionals and occupations for negotiations. Clause 4.2.2: “*Parties agree in principle to amend the OSD for social service professionals and occupations.*”

Several task team meetings were convened to look at various models to be used to determine areas that constitute a rural area. Unfortunately, owing to the unavailability of key role players and the absence of scientific research, the matter could not be finalised. Labour, however, indicated that this matter should be subjected to further negotiations to include additional occupational categories, as well as to consider the equalisation of the amount that is being paid to eligible employees. Parties agreed that a meeting will be scheduled within two weeks to constructively engage on this matter and finalise it.

Review: Uniform Allowance - Nurses

Members will recall that a draft agreement was circulated for mandating purposes, to engage on a framework agreement, which will regulate a process to review the Uniform Allowance agreement for Nurses. The objective of the agreement is as follows:

- Abolish provision of Uniform Allowance
- To bring uniformity in a true sense of the word uniform
- To restore the dignity of Health professionals
- Uniform provision to all Health professionals instead of paying an allowance to some.

The Uniform Task Team has finalised its task and resolved as follows:

- The material of the uniform should be mini-matt fabric.

- Labour must seek mandate on the colour of the uniform, with possible options being either maroon and white, or navy and white. However, there is concern that navy is worn by many professions.
- The colour of the shoes should be black.
- The pattern of male nurses' uniform should be Chinos, with a line style and straight cut.
- To consider the proposed South African Nursing emblem instead of accepting the current emblem, which represents the entire Health fraternity.

During the discussions it was, however, noted that not all parties are ready with a mandate on the proposals of the task team, and it was requested to extend the life span of the task team to discuss the colour of the shoes and the emblem. Members are therefore requested to provide the PSA with a mandate on the colour of the shoes, the uniform, and the emblem through their respective structures.

PHSDSBC Resolution 4/2017: Agreement on payment of Special Allowance and Danger Allowance for Forensic Pathology Officers (FPO)

A collective agreement was entered into between parties at Council and enjoyed majority signature on 29 June 2017. The Agreement's Clause 4.5.2 provides for the following: "*Parties agree to negotiate and conclude a sustainable model to allow the FPO to register with a statutory body as professionals, to have career pathing and job evaluation within six months after this agreement attains the majority signature.*"

Parties were supposed to conclude on this sustainable model on 29 January 2018, which unfortunately as per the evidence led by labour and the subsequent confirmation from the employer, did not materialise. After the conclusion and favourable outcome of an arbitration process, the employer tabled a draft Sustainable Model. The PSA distributed the draft for inputs and subsequent inputs were discussed with the employer. A special Council meeting was scheduled for 17 November 2020 to constructively engage on the matter, and the most contentious issue is the fact that Gauteng FPOs are not covered in this Model, as they do not fall within the ambit of the OSD agreement. The PSA raised serious challenges with the draft Model which, amongst others, raised more questions than answers, especially on the recognition of experience, stagnation, and subsequent requirements in relation to Facility Managers' salary levels, to mention a few.

Parties agreed that the employer would prepare a response on or before 30 November 2020. Labour would consider the response and parties subsequently agreed to a marathon session of engagements. The first round of engagement commenced on 8 March 2021. Unfortunately, the employer indicated that it did not have a mandate to engage on the collective agreement and will revert to Council. The PSA, together with all the other unions, declared a dispute and the conciliation is scheduled for 21 September 2021.

Averaging of working hours: EMRS

As previously reported, a draft agreement on the averaging of working hours was circulated for a mandate. Unfortunately, no mandate was received from the constituencies, which poses a significant risk to Emergency Medical and Rescue Services personnel. The PSA did subsequently indicate that it does not have a mandate on the draft agreement and is still in a process to solicit a mandate. Labour subsequently indicated that it has a fundamental problem with Clauses 4.1 and 4.2 and need to engage further. The employer, in return, pronounced that it is ready to sign the agreement and is of the view that the task team did conclude its work and is waiting upon labour.

GENERAL MANAGER