

Knives out for Motsoaledi over controversial #NHI

IOL **POLITICS** / 18 JUNE 2018,

Johannesburg - A pressure group has joined growing calls for Health Minister Dr Aaron Motsoaledi's head in a fierce fight linked to the looming introduction of National Health Insurance (NHI). The onslaught on Motsoaledi is coming from a pressure group of professional health practitioners and academics.

The 99 individuals in a list seen by The Star are calling for a review of the newly approved NHI. But Motsoaledi has hit back, saying the opposition to NHI and calls for his dismissal were being orchestrated by medical aids, which didn't want it to be implemented.

In a nine-page document, the pressure group blasted the public health management and NHI presentation, which Motsoaledi made to the cabinet last week. It was given the green light. Motsoaledi was expected to make NHI's contents public last week, but is now set to hold a media briefing this week.

Health spokesperson Foster Mohale said it would be difficult to comment on the document before the briefing. Mohale urged the group to wait for Motsoaledi to unpack the NHI Bill and participate in public comments.

This is the second round of organised criticism directed at Motsoaledi and his department, particularly concerning NHI, in recent weeks, after Cosatu pleaded with President Cyril Ramaphosa to axe Motsoaledi, accusing him of dragging his heels on NHI. The labour federation also blamed him for the general collapse of public healthcare facilities across the country.

Dr Amilcar Juggernath, a member of the group, said they had collective concerns about the poor state of public healthcare. "We are a collective who wanted to collaborate in the fight for better healthcare," he said. In the document, the group argued that the creation of NHI was unclear. It was "unresearched" and merely there to address the current crisis with no future plans.

"The most striking observation is that the government has lost control of the NHI narrative and will have to adopt a new approach to regain that control. It is now also common cause that implementation of NHI has been characterised by a lack of transparency, equivocal National Treasury support and, paradoxically, a deteriorating public service," the document states.

The group said it was in support of universal health coverage (UHC), which it believed would have been cost effective and easily accessible to all compared to NHI. Their call includes the formation of an inter-sectoral cabinet committee to manage the provincial and municipal health budgets, administration and service delivery in public healthcare.

The hard-hitting document has been perceived as bordering on a drastic call to put Motsoaledi's Health Ministry under administration. The document comes after Motsoaledi's presentation to the SACP central executive committee on June 2, which claimed that billions of rand were being channelled to private healthcare companies at the expense of the poor.

The minister's presentation came in a scenario in which the country's gross domestic product (GDP) plummeted in the first quarter of this year. It shows that 8.5% of the country's GDP went to healthcare, of which 4.4% was gobbled up by private healthcare, which serves only 16% of the population.

A whopping R46.7 billion was allegedly spent on government employees' medical aid schemes, with the remaining 4.1% of the GDP going to a public healthcare sector that accommodated 84% of the population. Motsoaledi's document also accused private hospital groups of squeezing an independent group of hospitals, formed by township doctors from the mid-1990s to 2006, out of business through rigorous commercialisation.

The independent group had more than 50% of the beds in the private sector in the early 1990s, but this had shrunk to 12.3% by 2006. Motsoaledi claimed the shrinkage had forced many doctors to abandon their practices to find work in the private and public sectors. Motsoaledi also came under intense pressure a few days ago when Health Ombudsman Professor Malegapuru Makgoba and the Committee of Medical Deans warned that the public healthcare system was facing a possible collapse.

Motsoaledi said Cosatu had betrayed him as he had been working closely with the federation. "I've always known that there would be problems but I didn't expect Cosatu to do this to me. I was addressing a lot of people about the NHI last week. Those people who support NHI need to come together, because there will be an onslaught from those who oppose it. It was a complete surprise that Cosatu is after me," Motsoaledi said.

The DA last week reiterated its stance on the NHI scheme, saying it was not feasible. Its response came as it launched its own universal healthcare plan, Our Health Plan. The DA said that after embarking on a month-long #HospitalHealthCheck oversight inspection campaign, it found that the healthcare system "is teetering on the brink of total collapse".

"The findings from our #HospitalHealthCheck oversight inspection campaign make it clear that all is not well in our public healthcare sector. Although there are financial constraints facing the department, it is evident that at the heart of our failing healthcare system is maladministration, poor oversight and the ANC's disconnect with the vulnerable and sick," said DA national spokesperson Refiloe Nt'sekhe.

"Motsoaledi's National Health Insurance will not solve the mess. The NHI is not feasible, as seen with the disastrous pilot projects across the country," Nt'sekhe added.