

### *Mismanagement blamed for departing doctors*

UNIVERSAL healthcare coverage in South Africa is threatened by the rate of brain drain among doctors, according to Econex director Cobus Venter. He said doctors left because they could not find work in South Africa because the public sector took forever to fill its posts. He said it was not a financial decision anymore. Venter said South Africa had enough financial capacity to sustain its doctors, while importing foreign doctors was costing the country more. He said it would be better to retain doctors trained in South Africa because the subsidy was already in the system and if it was not used, it would be lost forever. Venter said doctors left South Africa because of uncertainty and poor working conditions and not because of financial reasons as the country's salaries for doctors were comparable to most of the countries local doctors fled to. He said vacancies in the public sector, poor working conditions and shortages of equipment were not a money issue but a question of management, which was where uncertainty arose from. He said there was no way National Health Insurance could ne implemented with the current emigration rate. Venter's sentiments followed a written reply to parliament by Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi that showed 3 004 foreign doctors were working in South Africa last year. The latest statistics the department had on South African doctors working abroad were from 2006 and they showed that 8 921 doctors practised in other countries. Motsoaledi said his department did not have the number of vacancies for health workers in each province by post classification but a process was under way to fill vacancies after the launch of the human resources for health strategy in October last year. A total of 1 349 doctors were doing their internships and 1 103 doctors were doing community service at different hospitals around the country. There were 165 371 qualified practitioners registered with the Health Professionals Council of SA (HPCSA) by the end of March. The figure fell from 168 160 last year. These numbers included specialists as well as medical technicians, laboratory assistants and interns. Furthermore, some practitioners were still registered with the HPCSA although they were practicing overseas and had elected to have dual registration. Given that, the HPCSA estimated the figure for doctors practising in the country could be much less. Mark Sonderup, the acting chairman of the SA Medical Association, said doctors working in public hospitals found themselves in desperate situations where there were shortages of staff and no proper funding for the services doctors were expected to deliver. Some doctors in the Eastern Cape had not been paid since January. But instead of addressing such concerns, the department of health in the province had charged three doctors with misconduct for speaking to the media and public about the poor state of healthcare in the province's hospitals. Sonderup said the doctors had attempted at several levels to try and resolve the core issues with the department.