

Health Minister's 'lack of leadership' over pricing slammed

NEIL Nair, principal officer of Samwumed, has said that the Minister of Health needs to exercise "more decisive leadership - and not just promises at conferences". Nair addressed the annual conference of the Board of Healthcare Funders (BHF) the day after Minister of Health Dr Aaron Motsoaledi told delegates that he intended setting up an independent commission to look into "abnormal and unacceptable" pricing. But, Nair said, the form, content and timing of the commission remained unclear. He said he could not fathom why the Minister - via the Council for Medical Schemes - had been opposing efforts by medical schemes, under the umbrella of the BHF, to seek guidance from the courts on the intended definition of prescribed minimum benefit (PMB) costs. Nair said that surely the Minister must be at the helm of providing leadership direction on the critical matter of cost - because cost determined everything in the sound delivery of care. He said it was equally important that the Minister clarified what his intentions were regarding the pricing commission. If healthcare was indeed to be de-commercialised, as Motsoaledi had asserted, then the answer must surely be price regulation via the Department of Health. Nair said price negotiation, even if via a pricing commission, would result in the market dictating cost based on supply and demand, and might perpetuate current imbalances in the provision of care. He said the enforceability of such agreements was also tenuous - as they were by and large based on voluntary participation. Nair said the Council for Medical Schemes was a delegated authority under the custodianship of the Minister of Health and it would be logical for the Minister to intervene if he disagreed with key policy interpretations that the Registrar of Medical Schemes might have.

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