

## ***The evolution of the NHI***

THE Department of Health has previously presented the Ten Point Plan as the strategic focus of its efforts aimed at strengthening the health system. It has also presented the vision of a National Health Insurance (NHI) based system to be built brick-by-brick over the next 14 years. It has already launched the pilot sites which will help to better understand specific details on the path it has to travel in the evolution of the NHI scheme. The department has been open with South Africans that this is not going to be an event but a painstaking journey. Looking ahead, the national Department of Health is full of optimism for the future of quality and sustainable healthcare delivery in the country, considering the recent developments to mark the end of the year 2012. The launch of the Academy for Leadership and Management in Health, the signing of the Social Compact and the establishment of the Joint Public Health Enhancement Fund, are set to propel the national Department of Health on a trajectory of a greater and deeper cooperation. The confidence of the health stakeholders in the national Department of Health conveys a deep commitment for cooperation in both direct and indirect ways, to address the many challenges facing the health system. These challenges are enormous but certainly not beyond the collective capacity as South Africans.

The department can succeed working together in partnership and inspired by the collective commitment to build a health system that provides quality healthcare to all the South African citizens - rich and poor, urban and rural as well as across all the other many divides that characterise the nation. Looking on to 2013, it is well aware of the moments of elation as a result of significant breakthroughs as well as moments of setbacks whose importance will lie in the lessons it has learnt. But Minister of Health Dr Aaron Motsoaledi has always believed that "nothing brings out the best in us as South Africans than when we put our differences aside, focus on what we share and rise to the challenges confronting us. This has been the hallmark of our country. There is no doubt that looking ahead that we will continue to register significant victories in this fight." When building stronger partnerships, the department will focus more on human resources and HIV/AIDS, because these areas have the strategic importance of directly responding to the macro challenges identified by the National Development Plan, and also because they reflect areas of mutual interest between the public sector and the private sector. For 2013 the department has decided to prioritise the following projects:

### **Project 1: Expansion of the output of health professionals**

In 2013, this project will prioritise the expansion of MBChB intake in the South African faculties of health sciences. It is the intention that in the following years this will be expanded to include pharmacists, pharmacy assistants and other categories. South Africa has eight medical schools whose combined output has been inadequate to meet its needs as outlined in the department's human resources strategy. The Minister of Health is in discussions with the Ministers of Higher Education and of Finance on how he should tackle this challenge. This work is ongoing and is led by the director-generals of the three departments. The Minister is also engaging university deans and the Health Professions Council (HPCSA) to ensure good quality of outcomes.

So far, the response has been positive and collaborative. The private health sector, through the Public Health Enhancement Fund, has also agreed to contribute to this effort and assist with the funding for needy students starting in 2013. This significant contribution will make provision for both a bursary component as well as needed support at the institutional level to ensure that the needy students supported through this fund are provided with the best possible chance of succeeding. A team led by the director-general of health, Precious Matsoso, and some representatives from the private sector, are in the process of finalising the details of this work.

### **Project 2: Support for the Academy for Leadership and Management in Health**

The challenges of the health sector require the development of leaders with enhanced technical, management and leadership skills and competencies. In response to the observed shortcomings in the management of the public health sector, the Minister of Health commissioned work through the

Development Bank of South Africa on an assessment of the competencies of the hospital managers, because of the level of unhappiness expressed by the public. The Minister then embarked on a process of defining specifically the requirements for leadership of these institutions. This process was followed with the advertisement of most of these posts so that more suitable candidates could be sought. A lot of effort has gone into this and significant progress has been made. It was in this context that the Academy of Leadership was launched recently. Recognising a key challenge to ensure that the new candidates were better prepared for their positions and equipped before settling in their new roles, the department last week convened a quality seminar to provide guidance to hospital chief executives on compliance to quality standards. The goal was to ensure that patient care is of acceptable standards: documentation is clear, consistent, accurate, complete, and timely, and that it satisfies stated or implied requirements of quality patient care. At a more strategic and long-term level, how does the department ensure that it sets itself on course to have a steady stream of well-trained cadres who appreciate the nuances of managing and leading in the health sector so that South Africa never finds herself wanting? Simple, the Minister of Health has appointed an advisory panel with both local and international expertise. The panel is chaired by Professor Marian Jacobs, dean of the health sciences faculty at the University of Cape Town. This advisory board will help structure a programme in collaboration with South Africa's training institutions for these new hospital managers, to commence in late January or early February 2013. It will focus on practical issues related to the day-to-day management of the institutions. The board will also provide advice on the most appropriate route to follow in the context for the development of future leaders for all levels of South Africa's health system. The private health sector has agreed to join the department in this effort to support this development and work of the academy. This will significantly enhance our ability to arrest the possible further downward spiral in the management and leadership of the country's health institutions and health system as a whole.

### **Project 3: Support for development of high level expertise in understanding and effective clinical management of the twin epidemics of TB and HIV/AIDS**

One of the major national priorities of the department is to reduce new infections and offer more effective and humanitarian care for people with HIV and AIDS. The Minister has been in discussions with the many centres in South Africa active in these areas including the medical research council, the KwaZulu-Natal research institute for tuberculosis and HIV and the health and reproductive unit. The private health sector, through the Public Health Enhancement Fund, has pledged a sum of R40- million to provide scholarships for doctoral, post-doctoral and master's studies in biomedical, clinical and health systems in the area of HIV, AIDS and TB. These are very important areas of our healthcare system. The director-general of health and a team from the private sector will work together and oversee the successful implementation of these projects and progress reports will be tabled in the bi-annual consultations the department will have with the signatory companies starting with the meeting in the first quarter of next year.

### **Popo Maja is spokesperson for the national Department of Health**

*Popo Maja: The Mail & Guardian, 14 December 2012*