

Blackout on NHI feared

AN IN-DEPTH newsletter examining how the National Health Insurance would work has been removed from the medical aid regulator's website. The action has been slammed as censorship. The Council for Medical Schemes posted a range of articles on the proposed National Health Insurance scheme a week ago. The articles are no longer accessible as the council was pressured to remove them by an official at the Department of Health, said health economist Professor Alex van der Heever. Van der Heever is the Wits social chair at the Graduate School of Public and Development Management. He said council staff told him that the registrar was asked to remove the newsletter. He said he was disgusted at this blatant abuse of public institutions and free and open debate. The link to the newsletter is no longer working. The articles written by healthcare experts expressed different viewpoints on how best to provide high-quality healthcare to all South Africans. The Council for Medical Schemes spokesman Dr Elsabie Conradie blamed a computer problem for the link being dead. In 2009, the Health Department published a review of media articles on the proposed health scheme and listed eight commentators who had expressed "cynical and damaging remarks". Van der Heever, who previously worked at the Council for Medical Schemes, was among the eight. He said the regulator was not independent of political interference and there was intolerance of open discussion. Werksman director and health lawyer Neil Kirby said the precise whereabouts of the white paper on the National Health Insurance scheme was worrying and was making a number of sectors anxious about what was not being said. The white paper will give details about how the scheme will be implemented. No date about its release has been given.

Katharine Child: The Times, 5 April 2013