

## **Government prepares for NHI roll-out**

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Around 1 000 delegates attended the 2nd South African Pharmacy Conference at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli Conference Centre.

THE Department of Health will invest R17 billion over the next three years into upgrading the country's public clinics to "workable" levels in line with a broader preparation for introducing the National Health Insurance (NHI) system.

This is according to the Health Minister Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, who addressed around 1 000 delegates who gathered in Durban from Friday, 21 to Monday, 24 October, to discuss the future of pharmacy at the second South African Pharmacy Conference at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli Conference Centre.

Opening the conference on Friday, 21 October, Motsoaledi indicated the government has concluded an investigation into the amount required to upgrade the clinics into facilities capable of delivering services to their communities. The figure unveiled was insufficient for high level services, but would hopefully provide key medications and the infrastructure medical staff demanded.

In a wide-ranging, hard-hitting delivery, Motsoaledi called the NHI and the #FeesMustFall campaigns the same side of the coin rather than diametrically opposed initiatives. He said while the world economic systems are divided into communism or socialism and capitalism, education and healthcare are the two indisputable issues where the state has to provide the resources.

Motsoaledi said many people currently criticising the NHI were the same people wholeheartedly supporting the #FeesMustFall campaign without recognising the link between the two. Education ministries provide bursaries for the poor who cannot afford the fees to further their studies, but the healthcare system only helps the rich.

"If there is to be equity, specifically free education for the poor at tertiary level, there must be free medical assistance for the poor as well. Medical aids are nothing more than pre-payments for future medical demands, because nothing in life is free – someone always has to pay for it," Motsoaledi said.

Motsoaledi said the NHI was not calling for private healthcare to be closed down to introduce a "poor public healthcare system that is corrupt, inefficient and unable to deliver," but South Africa must recognise the current private healthcare system was expensive in global terms.

"We now know you cannot have sound economic growth without a good healthcare system. That means you cannot end poverty, unemployment and inequality with poor healthcare systems," he said.

The conference also addressed hard hitting topics such as #FeesMustFall threatening academia as professionals consider corporate employment, the changing student profiles which demands changes to pharmacy teaching, and the topic of community collaboration as being key in the implementation of high quality pharmaceutical services.

South African Pharmacy Council president Prof Mano Chetty indicated the #FeesMustFall crisis would have dire consequences for the profession if students were unable to complete the 2016 education year. In an industry already suffering significant shortages, not having the current year able to graduate or have new students enter the system in 2017 would have a knock-on effect throughout the profession and South Africa's ability to deliver on its healthcare commitments.

Omphemetse Mokgatle, representing the National Department of Health, spoke of the Department's goal to ensure an adequate and reliable supply of safe, cost effective medicine of acceptable quality and the rational use of prescribers, dispensers and consumers to all South Africans.

As a solution, Mokgatle reported that the Department is aiming to achieve "ideal clinic status" for 3 477 clinics to address these challenges by 2019 which will effectively mean a "clinic with good infrastructure, adequate staff, adequate medicine and supplies and good administrative processes."

This will directly impact the successful rollout of the NHI of which there are currently 11 pilots nationally

*By Lauren Walford*