

Enough is enough – MEC Dhlomo must be fired

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The DA calls on the KwaZulu Natal Premier, Willies Mchunu, to fire the province's Health MEC, Sibongiseni Dhlomo. The DA will also write to the national Minister of Health, Aaron Motsoaledi, to highlight the numerous challenges the province's health system is currently facing.

This follows yesterday's horrific story in the Tribune newspaper which highlights the true state of KZN Health and also reveals that the department is facing possible administration. This is direct evidence that the MEC has failed in his mandate and must be considered grounds for his dismissal.

The DA in KZN has repeatedly sounded the alarm bell as this department lurches from one crisis to the next with patients suffering in unacceptable conditions. The tangle that MEC Dhlomo now finds himself in is a direct consequence of the department's poor decision to freeze posts in 2015. Despite his claims that the moratorium has been lifted, the red tape to declare and make posts available is still in place.

Doctor numbers in rural areas have been especially hard-hit. This despite the fact that 51 out of more than 100 unemployed post community service doctors have applied unsuccessfully to work at state facilities in KZN. Meanwhile, the MEC remains silent, leaving it to his spokesperson to claim that doctors are at fault because they do not want to work where they are needed.

The DA is in possession of the list of doctors and the hospitals where they have applied to work. Facilities include Madadeni, Mosvold, Emmaus, Bethesda, Applebosch, Prince Mshiyeni Memorial, Ngewlezana and others. Anyone who knows where these facilities are will know that blaming doctors for not wanting to work in rural areas is a blatant lie.

Even NHI districts, which have some priority, have massive doctor vacancies. This is not due to a shortage of applicants or doctors being unwilling to work in these areas. A breakdown of these areas are as follows:

- In Umzinyathi the total vacancy rate for medical officers in all categories is an astounding 47.56%
- In Amajuba, it is 24% and in Umgungundlovu it is an overall 20.5%
- Umgungundlovu and Richmond Hospitals have a vacancy rate of a shocking 57%, Eastboom CHC 38% and Applebosch Hospital 40%.

With such high vacancy rates, doctors are extremely overworked. They are also burdened by uncertainty regarding overtime payment - even though the department temporarily suspended the implementation of its poorly thought-out overtime policy.

Ultimately, it is about the health and safety of patients. With doctor shortages and protracted overtime, patient care will worsen. Tired doctors make more mistakes too. With current medico-legal claims against the department in excess of R10billion, one would think that the MEC would sit up and take notice.

That KZN's three flagship NHI pilot projects have such massive vacancy rates, speaks volumes about the ANC's political enthusiasm to serve the public. Add to this the uncertainty following the very recent resignation of senior staff members at the provincial department's head office and the department's financial woes, and it becomes clear that there is an even bigger crisis looming.

MEC Dhlomo has put KZN healthcare in ICU. He must either resign or be given the boot. Enough is enough.

Issued by Imran Keeka, DA KZN Spokesperson on Health