

Loss of Humphrey Zokufa leaves gap in health sector

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Humphrey Zokufa, who died at the weekend after a short illness, was an outspoken pharmacist-turned-health administrator whose career spanned the public and private sector.

He spent 11 years at the helm of the Board of Healthcare Funders (BHF), an association representing the interests of medical schemes and their administrators, before becoming registrar of the Council for Medical Schemes (CMS) in November.

His appointment by Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi was controversial, as he effectively moved from player to referee, but in his characteristically good-natured style, he shrugged off his critics.

While he was MD of the BHF Zokufa led a high-profile court case challenging the CMS over its interpretation of regulation 8 to the Medical Schemes Act, which governs payment for prescribed minimum benefits (PMBs). The CMS maintained that medical schemes must pay for PMBs in full, regardless of what healthcare providers charged, while the BHF had lobbied to get such payments capped at rates determined by schemes.

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His sudden death leaves the CMS's board confronting the question of whether it must recruit a new registrar from scratch, or whether it can make a recommendation to the minister based on the candidates it scrutinised in 2016. That issue will be discussed at a meeting, likely to be convened ahead of the board's next gathering in late February, according to council chairman Yosuf Veriava.

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CMS chief financial officer Daniel Lehutjo is to take up the role of acting registrar, a position he held for more than two years prior to Zokufa's appointment.

Prior to working at the BHF, Zokufa was registrar of the Medicines Control Council and worked in the Department of Health as its chief director for pharmaceutical policy and planning.

He is survived by his wife Thandi, his son and three daughters.

By Tamar Kahn in Business Day