

## **NHI could see government paying contractors for AIDS treatment**

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THE proposed National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme will revolutionise the fight against HIV/Aids. This is the view of Dr Gustaaf Wolvaardt, a member of the organising committee of the eighth HIV/AIDS conference in Durban last week. Speaking on the sidelines of the conference, Wolvaardt said the NHI would ensure all those infected with HIV/AIDS had access to appropriate, efficient and quality health services. Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi described the proposed healthcare system as a health financing system that pooled funds to provide access to quality health services for all South Africans irrespective of their socio-economic status. Wolvaardt said one of the challenges with the current healthcare system was providing HIV/AIDS services for specific communities like taxi drivers, commercial sex workers and foreigners who found it difficult to access government services.

He said HIV-positive men who are working must take a day's leave to go to the clinic, losing income. That is too much of a sacrifice. With NHI, a doctor contracted to provide AIDS treatment for uninsured taxi drivers will tailor-make services to suit their needs. He said it won't end there: the doctor can be paid extra for suppressing the viral load and providing support groups. That is how NHI will provide the best possible healthcare for HIV patients. Wolvaardt said the NHI would prioritise quality because the government would stop being a provider of healthcare and become a purchaser, contracting service providers. He said the nice thing where government starts buying services is that it can insist on a certain standard and quality. That's what makes NHI a good healthcare system. It says a competitor who is willing to provide a service at the standard that government wants is the one who gets the contract. Wolvaardt also believed Motsoaledi's "heart and soul is in the right place" and that under Motsoaledi, the Health Ministry was committed to implementing NHI. He said NHI is a progressive implementation, it's not something we can switch on tomorrow. We are not talking about a one-year project. We are talking about something that will take 10 to 15 years to get into place. The full benefit will not be seen immediately. He added that the building blocks were coming together, including the Office for Health Standards Compliance which was already in place. The conference was attended by scientists, medical practitioners and representatives from the public sector, NGO and faith-based sectors and the corporate sector. Although South Africa has made commendable strides in the fight against HIV/Aids, the sentiment at the conference was that more needed to be done to eradicate the epidemic.

*Zimasa Matiwane: Saturday Argus*