

Review NHI, urge 99 medical professionals

PRETORIA NEWS / 15 JUNE 2018

Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi says opposition to the NHI scheme and calls for his head are being orchestrated by some medical aid societies that do not want it to be implemented. A NEW group made up of health professionals and academics is piling pressure on Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi ahead of the introduction of the National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme.

The 99 individuals on the list - seen by Independent Media - are calling for a review of the NHI.

Motsoaledi has hit back saying opposition to the NHI and calls for his head are being orchestrated by some medical aid societies that do not want it to be implemented.

In a nine-page document, the pressure group blasts the public health management and NHI given the nod by cabinet last week.

Motsoaledi was expected to make the NHI scheme's contents public this week but will now probably only hold a media briefing next week. Health spokesperson Foster Mohale said it would be difficult to comment on the document before this briefing. He urged the group to wait for Motsoaledi to unpack the NHI bill and then participate in public comments.

This is the second round of organised criticism directed at Motsoaledi and his department, particularly concerning NHI, in less than a week.

Last week Cosatu pleaded with President Cyril Ramaphosa to get rid of Motsoaledi, accusing him of dragging the implementation of NHI. The labour federation also blamed him for the general collapse of public health facilities across the country.

In the latest attack, Dr Amilcar Juggernath, part of the group of 99, said they had collective concerns about the poor state of public health. "We are a collective who wanted to collaborate in the fight for better healthcare."

In the document, the group argues that the creation of the NHI was unclear. Also, that it was "unresearched" and merely there to address the current crisis with no future plans.

"The most striking observation is that the government has lost control of the NHI narrative. It will have to adopt a new approach to regain that control. It is now also common cause that implementation of the NHI has been characterised by a lack of transparency, equivocal Treasury support and, paradoxically, a deteriorating public service," reads the document.

The group said it supported Universal Health Coverage (UHC) that would have been cost effective and easily accessible to all compared with the NHI.

Among their calls is for the formation of an inter-sectoral cabinet committee to manage the provincial and municipal health budgets, administration and service delivery in public health.

“The swift transfer of industrial scale health institutions, such as academic complexes and specialised institutes, to a national authority under presidential mandate,” they said.

The move has been perceived as bordering on a drastic call to put Motsoaledi’s health ministry under administration.

The document emerges against the backdrop of Motsoaledi’s presentation to the SACP Central Executive Committee (CEC) on June 2 which showed how billions of rand was being channelled to private health companies at the expense of the poor.

His presentation came as the country’s GDP plummeted by 2.2% in the first quarter of this year. The leaked presentation shows 8.5% of the country’s GDP went to healthcare of which 4.4% was gobbled up by private health that services only 16% of the population. A whopping R46.7billion is allegedly spent on government employees’ medical aid schemes with the remaining 4.1% of the GDP going to a public health sector that accommodates 84% of the population.

Motsoaledi’s document also accused private hospital groups of squeezing the independent group of hospitals formed by township doctors out of business from the mid 1990s to 2006 through rigorous commercialisation. The independent group had more than 50% of beds in the private sector in the early 1990s and this number shrunk to 12.3% by 2006.