

Why township hospital group Clinix is excited about NHI

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The first black-owned township private hospital group is not only “excited” about the prospect of the National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill coming into effect, but the Clinix Health Group says it is also keen to see where it can bridge the private-public gap.

“The NHI is seeking to do what we’ve been working to do in the community, which is to bring affordable quality healthcare. That prospect for us is pretty exciting.

“Government is also looking to procure services from private providers, and our facilities would be the ideal partnership as they would be able to provide CT scans or X-rays, for example,” Dumani Kula, deputy chief executive of Clinix Health Group, told City Press this week.

The group started out with one hospital 26 years ago, at a time when black medical specialists did not have environments to practice in, and the surrounding community did not have access to private healthcare.

It has since grown to having five operating hospitals spread across Soweto (two), Mafikeng, Vosloorus in Boksburg and Sebokeng in Vereeniging.

“By virtue of being in townships, our mandate is different. Our communities can’t afford exorbitant co-payments. Doctors in Sandton can charge what they want for treating patients, but we have limitations because we have to consider what our people can afford. That also makes it hard for our professionals, but we have a good set of people who understand our vision,” Kula said.

The group employs 150 medical specialists, and while Kula admitted it has been a challenge attracting specialists because of the pricing issues, he said they were looking forward to introducing their first intake of cardiologists at the Dr SK Matseke Memorial Hospital in Diepkloof this month.

“We have the basic specialities, but in areas such as Mafikeng, which saw the recent collapse of its health system, it has been a struggle to retain professionals. We are slowly, in a way, winning the battle as 40% of our doctors work full time at the hospitals and the majority have links with the public sector. One of our drives is to get them to be full time at our facilities.”

The group – with roughly 45 000 patient admissions a year – said what they were against was keeping the status quo of the ailing public health sector the way it currently is.

“As it is, public health is falling apart and the knee-jerk reaction from some role players in the private industry threatening to ‘pack and go’ is irresponsible. I think converging resources can

be a good thing. There's an opportunity for private providers to service a much broader population, and that was the vision of our founders," he said.

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