

Neglect at hospitals a threat to NHI – Sowetan 20 August

2019

It's been some eight years since the wheels of the National Health Insurance, the grand scheme meant to improve provision of healthcare in SA, started rolling.

The process started back in August 2011 and we are supposed to be midway through the journey that should culminate in 2026 in a fully operational NHI.

When he introduced the vision the then minister of health Dr Aaron Motsoaledi said the phased implementation of NHI would take 15 years. The first phase, which began in 2012 and ended in 2017, focused on piloting the project and the establishment of the NHI Fund and other key institutions required and placement of key, central hospital to national jurisdiction.

The next five years were about making the NHI Fund fully functional and to put in place management and governance structures for purchase of services and population registration. The current phase is also about sorting out relevant legislation. To this end the NHI Bill was introduced last week.

The home stretch between 2022 and 2026 will culminate in the finalisation of the Medical Schemes Amendment Act and contracting of private hospital and specialist services as the NHI goes full throttle.

These are well-laid plans that we are afraid might come to nothing unless the single biggest ingredient meant to make the NHI a success - human resource - has not fully bought into the plan.

But judging by the horror stories that are almost a daily staple at healthcare facilities the dream might just be stillborn.

Today, elsewhere in this edition we tell yet another story of lack of compassion from healthcare workers on whom much of the success of the NHI rests.

A woman lost her newborn because a nurse at Mamelodi Hospital wouldn't be bothered with assisting her, ostensibly because she was a foreign national.

Theresa Ngwendu says she was told "this is not Zimbabwe," and to "close your legs and go there", when she protested that she felt the baby was coming.

Hospital management have promised to probe the incident.

We welcome the promise to get to the bottom of this but frequency of such horror tales casts doubts about service at state healthcare facilities on which no doubt the success of the NHI will depend.

