North West hospitals set the pace

Renovations a success, but there are safety and security issues

ZINHLE MAPUMULO
zinhle.mapumulo@citypress.co.za

If you want a better idea of what South Africa’s public hospitals will look like once the National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme starts for real, head to North West. In Tsepong, Klerksdorp, Potchefstroom and Ventersdorp, which are some of the district’s biggest towns, massive renovations have already happened at public hospitals.

The renovations put the Dr K Kaunda District ahead of the pack - at least in terms of its hospitals’ physical appearance.

The recently renovated surgical and medical wards in Jouberton’s Tsepong Hospital look nothing like other state hospitals. The units have been painted pumpkin orange, purple and in different hues of blue. The colour range is complemented with UV lighting - a practical bid to enhance infection control, because it’s believed that UV lighting can kill germs. Cleanliness is one of the district’s biggest successes - its hospitals are spotless, and automatic hand sanitising machines stand guard at every ward entrance, alongside warnings not to enter without washing your hands.

“We are proud to say that we have some of the cleanest hospitals in the country and it’s no wonder we were chosen to pilot the NHI,” said the district’s chief director of health services, Dr Uma Nagpal.

Only hospitals’ multi and extensively drug-resistant tuberculous units were guarded. City Press was not monitored or approached during its visits, which, while an excellent chance to get an uncensored picture of the situation, was worrying from a security point of view.

Nagpal admitted that security was not the district’s strongest suit.

“Patient and staff safety is one of our priorities as it is in the six quality standards of NHI. All our facilities have security guards and after the rape incident we requested that all exit doors at wards remain locked at night,” she said.

The district is the only one in the province chosen to pilot the NHI. Among its key focus areas over the next year, as a pilot district, will be meeting scheme standards for revitalising infrastructure, improving the quality of healthcare and strengthening human resources.

Nagpal said more exciting renovations and upgrades were planned for the next five years.

“Our main focus this year would be on upgrading primary healthcare centres and making them attractive to people as they are the foundation of the NHI. Lack of faith in clinics is still a very big problem in this province. Patients bypass clinics and flock to hospitals because they feel that the level of care is better in hospital when in fact it’s the same,” Nagpal said.

The acting chief executive officer of Klerksdorp and Tsepong Hospital Complex, Maria Dikane, agreed.

Both the admission areas of...
Nurses do their rounds at a Tshepong Hospital ward

A nurse attends to patients with renal failure at a Klerksdorp hospital

The recently renovated toilets at Tshepong Hospital are impressive

Nurses attend to a premature baby at the renovated ICU ward in Klerksdorp

NHI: the districts in review: North West hospitals set the pace..P2/3

Date: 20 May 2012
Publication: CITY PRESS
Page Number: 14
Author: ZINHLE MAPUMULO
Language: English
Categories: Health - General
her facilities were packed to capacity, with some patients saying they had been in queues for more than three hours but had not even received their files.

Dikane admitted that long queues remained a huge challenge in the two facilities. Part of the problem, she explained, were patients who bypassed clinics and, in effect, referred themselves to hospitals. Pressure or overflow from neighbouring districts also contributed to the problem, she said. The situation is similar at Potchefstroom Hospital. "We are also experiencing challenges with waiting time," acting chief executive officer Pali Motsi said. Nagpal said that, like other hospitals and clinics nationwide, staffing was an issue. The district's rural areas are particularly hard hit by a lack of specialists, but that is set to change - teams of gynaecologists, paediatricians and family physicians are about to be appointed in those areas. "The team would be able to identify what staff is needed where and how we can ensure that quality of life is improved in that area," Nagpal said.