

NHI will cover everything

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HEALTH Minister Dr Aaron Motsoaledi has warned there will be “proverbial blood on the floor” when the National Health Insurance is implemented. He said it would be shed in the private sector and that was the mess which had to be dealt with. He counted procurement and supply chain management among the biggest problems in the public health sector, which left workers without the basic tools of the trade. Motsoaledi said the poorest get the least in services while the rich get the most. He said both private and public health had problems and these would have to change with the introduction of the universal health coverage tool. There would be resistance because people had become used to doing things their own way, he said.

He told his audience an analysis of the private health system had found it was extremely expensive. He gave examples of the costs, which he said were exorbitant and quickly depleted funds. Motsoaledi said once patients run out of funds, treatment is immediately stopped and they are kicked out. He said healthcare workers in the private health sector no longer practised the basics of handling a new patient. They no longer check the pulse, but check your pocket, he said. They look for a medical aid card and when they don't find it, they look for a credit card. This, he said, had changed the face of healthcare delivery. Motsoaledi said universal healthcare coverage would remove the barriers to healthcare, which included finances, and would reduce the large health expenses and ultimately contribute to better quality of life. It will alleviate poverty and improve human development, he said. The country also needed the NHI to deal with the four burdens of disease, which included communicable diseases and trauma from vehicle accidents. Violence between people and on the road was the fourth burden on the health system, and it stemmed from the violent nature of South Africans.

Motsoaledi said it was embarrassing when doctors from overseas were sent to SA to learn about treating stab wounds, “when we are not even at war”. He blamed private hospitals for pushing costs up in their quest to make it on the stock exchange. That is where the money is going,” he said, adding that a hospital on the stock exchange would deal with patients as a business dealt with clients. He said the NHI would be funded through mandatory prepayment for healthcare. The predominant payment for medical care was cash and this was a big problem. Motsoaledi said medical aids do that, but only for the 16 percent privileged few. Too many were left out of the private healthcare sector. He said when 80 percent are left to rely on one public sector this led to a collapse of the system. The introduction of NHI will cover everything, he said adding it would usher in a change in the system in both private and public sectors.

By Ntando Makhubu: Saturday Argus