

NHI- The frightening public health employment statistics

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An ongoing concern in the implementation of the National Health Insurance scheme (NHI) in South Africa, is the lacking number of healthcare personnel being trained that would ultimately be available to render services in the NHI. There is an absence of steps being taken to increase the number of medical graduates in South Africa, which would lead to a radical shortage of NHI staff, going forward. In 2001, there were 1229 Medical school graduates in South Africa. In 2013, the number of graduates has increased to 1409^[1]. This is an increase of 14.6% in graduates over a 12 year period, with a peak of 1511 graduates in 2005. In the same period, the population in South Africa increased from 44.8 million to 53 million. This amounts to an 18.2% increase in population. There is thus an absence in true correlation between population growth and the number of medical school graduates produced in South Africa. This serves to increase the shortage of doctors available to the NHI. In 2006 there were 5.9 million citizens per medical school, while in 2013, this number has increased to 6.6 million per medical school. South Africa produces 3.7 medical graduates per 100 000 citizens, whereas the OECD average is 10.7 per 100 000 citizens². There is no indication in the White Paper that the number of medical schools or graduates will be increased sufficiently to cover the requirements for the NHI.

A second concern is that in 2010, 42.5% of posts in the public health sector in South Africa were vacant, which was an increase from 33% in 2009 and 27% in 2005^[2]. There is thus a decreasing number of health professionals working in the public sector, with provinces such as Limpopo facing 70% vacancies in posts. A concerning trend in the public health system is also that while medical doctor numbers have only increased from 15 554 in 1997 to 16 006 in 2006 (2.9% increase in 10 years) administration and management posts increased from 28 676 in 1997 to 37 419 in the same period, a 30.4% increase. There was also a 259% increase in managers in the same period (increased from 420 to 1091). Growth in public sector employment is thus focusing on the wrong areas. This is especially worrying, as there were 11 700 medical graduates from 2002 to 2010 and only 4403 additional posts were created in the public sector². Despite massive numbers of vacancies, government is unable to retain medical staff, which is another indication that poor work circumstances is leading to loss of healthcare personnel.

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[1] Econex Report. August 2015. "Identifying determinants of and solutions to the shortage of doctors in South Arica: Is there a role for the private sector in Medical Education".

[2] Lloyd B, Sander D & Lehmann, U. 2010. "Human Resource requirements for National Health Insurance". *SA Health Review 2010*.