

New threat to medical aids

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Humphrey Zokufa, once a medical aid industry insider, has been appointed registrar of the Council for Medical Schemes by Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi.

The national health insurance policy paper, which Zokufa supports, predicts the demise of medical schemes in their current form. The white paper proposes that there be a single medical aid fund for all state and private patients.

"I will be regulating medical schemes to ensure they are aligning to the transformation agenda, ushering them into the NHI," he said.

Zokufa wants the skills commanded by the medical aid industry, which he calls a national asset, to be used to administer the NHI fund.

"The reality is that people don't understand the way medical schemes are now," Zokufa said. "They are not sustainable . the model is not viable."

He said members of medical aid schemes were getting older and sicker, and claiming more, and premiums were rising by more than the consumer price inflation rate every year.

"The number of people on medical aids has not grown significantly for the past 10 or 15 years."

Zokufa said a two-tier private and public healthcare system was not in line with the constitution, which prescribes healthcare for all.

Johann Serfontein, a health consultant, said: "If the registrar is supportive of government policies that will radically reduce the number of medical schemes it raises questions about the sustainability of the sector."

"With his [Zokufa's] questionable viewpoint of unsustainability of medical aids, it is clear that he is unlikely to take any positive steps to turn the 'unsustainable' industry around and promote healthy operations prior to the implementation of the NHI in 2025," he said.

Zokufa's appointment has many industry insiders shocked because he is 64 and 65 is the council's compulsory retirement age. Spokesman Joe Maila said Motsoaledi had "applied his mind and Zokufa was the right choice".

By KATHARINE CHILD - Timeslive