



RHAP Statement on North West Health Emergency

ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE IN NORTH WEST PROVINCE REMAINS UNDER SIEGE DESPITE APPOINTMENT OF NATIONAL TASK TEAM

70 doctors demand for “The National Department of Health to guarantee both patients’ and health care workers’ safety when receiving and delivering services” has not been met one week after open letter.

3 May 2018

While it may seem that the worst of the riots in the North West Province have passed, following a climax of protest and violence over the past two weeks, the situation is all but stable with continued reports of patients left unattended and worse, as reported by a doctor yesterday:

“Protestors in Tshepong theatre. They are forcing staff out. We have 3 cases pending in theatre but we are unable to continue working in theatre. We are getting out.”

A doctors letter¹ by 70 doctors indicated the depth and breadth of the problems facing North West Province healthcare services. Much needs to be done to ensure safe access to healthcare is restored for patients.

Some doctors have been quoted earlier in the week as saying: *“How do we work when we don’t have nurses on duty? Patients are coming to knock on our doorsteps looking for help which is putting our families at risk”.*

Another doctor laments: *“Our registrars and interns are still in the hospital but they have taken all our nurses.”*

While one doctor says that peace and quiet has returned at his facility after a morning of violent protest action, another responds, *“but it means that we are not sure whether the service will be back to normal tomorrow. In essence, we must just wait and see.”*

Today a rural doctor expressed concerned that *“due to the uncertainty, from the remote areas we cannot send patients”* upwards to higher levels of care.

While the National Task Team, consisting of various Ministries including Health, Finance and the Justice, Crime Prevention and Security Cluster is expected to submit a report with recommendations next week, which will certainly looking into short and long term interventions, more is needed immediately now to meet the 70 doctors plea for “The National Department of Health to guarantee both patients’ and health care workers’ safety when receiving and delivering services.”

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Founded by:



¹ <http://rhap.org.za/north-west-doctors-open-letter-health-crisis/>

Questions to the National Task Team:

- What measures are in place for health users requiring emergency treatment during the protest action if facilities in close proximity, are closed?
- What security measures are in place for both healthcare users and workers? Security services are not optimal to ward off mob protestors who enter facilities.
- Six hospitals in the province refer to a regional hospital in Klerksdorp – uncertainty of planned patient transport and the situation at the referral hospital makes for a delay in access to treatment. How will this be circumvented?
- When will each hospital management be able to access feedback from the meeting and filter this information down to the clinical teams?
- What is the identified action plan for health service delivery in the province in a constrained and unprotected working environment?
- Will the task team develop and share a communication plan with all stakeholders (healthcare workers, patients and civil society)?
- Will the Minimum Level Service Agreement (MLSA) be reviewed in order to protect patients' healthcare during times of industrial action?

We further reiterate the recommendation by the Rural Health Advocacy Project to have civil society representatives on the task team and for the process to be transparent². While health allocations will rightfully be under scrutiny, we draw attention to the loss of 1299 health posts between 2015 and 2017 due to 'austerity measures' and call upon a process that prioritises critical health posts to ensure access to healthcare for all. Critical health posts are not limited to doctors posts and referral centres in densely populated regions. Special attention should be given to most vulnerable groups such as rural communities in the deprived parts of the province.

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² <http://bhekisisa.org/article/2018-04-19-00-missing-medicines-and-missing-money-why-a-bigger-crisis-looms-in-north-west>