

Health Care Worker Safety and PPE

As government, we have constantly given our commitment to the public that the protection of health workers, including doctors and nurses, is of utmost importance. This workforce remains at the frontline of our battle against COVID-19 and it is in our interest as government to ensure that they are protected.

The Department of Health therefore notes, with concern, increasing allegations of health care workers contracting the Coronavirus on the line of duty due to lack or poor quality of personal protective equipment. We have even received reports that some may be dying after being infected due to the lack of sufficient PPE or due to sufficient PPE not be provided and/ or failure or neglect by management to adhere to prescribed workplace safety protocols.

We want to outrightly state that this cannot be tolerated.

To give an example, a few days ago my office brought to my attention that there were public reports that a doctor had passed away at George Mukhari Academic Hospital due to COVID-19 related illness. There were also allegations that this was due to lack of sufficient supply of PPE and doctors being made to work in unsafe environments at the facility. I viewed these allegations in a serious light and have decided to urgently appoint a team led by Professor Taole Mokoena together with other medical, nursing and legal professionals, to conduct an urgent investigation and

This report will provide me with independent findings and recommendations. These will also be communicated publicly. I want to assure members of the public that if individuals entrusted with positions of power in health facilities or even at district level are found to be in dereliction of duty by not ensuring adherence with health protocols, appropriate action will be taken against them.

We encourage health care workers at this facility to avail themselves for this probe. I believe that this approach of zooming into specific incidents will assist us to establish the

Unions have been raising their concerns about workplace safety, the availability and quality of PPE and the mental and physical wellbeing of their members. We also recognize the critical role-plays by Unions in representing their members' views and concerns at the workplace during this period.

We have noted reports from Unions collected through their fact finding missions and also the ones indicating shortage of PPE in some hospitals. I have since instructed the provinces to ensure that PPE is immediately made available at those facilities highlighted and for a report to be made available.

The provinces have also been instructed to ensure that the Occupational Health and Safety Committees are established in every province, district and health facility. This is to facilitate constant communication and co-operation between unions and management. I have now obliged all provinces to ensure that these committees are fully formed and functional within the week and must meet at least once a week. In these OHS meetings staff and ~~functional~~

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