

Mkhize promises to sort out issues of PPE distribution.

Full View - 24 Aug 2020

Mkhize promises to sort out issues of PPE distribution. .container body #yt_logo h1,h2,h3 h4 #js-mainnav.blackwhite ul.level1 .childcontent @media screen and (max-width: 767px) {#js-mainnav.megamenu.noJS ul.megamenu li } Monday, 24 August 2020 12:00 Photo Credit:GCIS.

Health Minister, Dr Zweli Mkhize, has reiterated that no health care worker should be exposed to the risk of contracting COVID-19 on duty due to inadequate training, protection and support, including the availability of personal protective equipment (PPE). The Health Department met with unions on Saturday to ventilate issues that have caused tension on matters relating to the occupational safety of health care workers, infrastructure and remuneration. Present at the meeting was the Health Department's senior national officials, provincial Members of the Executive (MECs) and their Heads of Department (HODs). Despite later claims that the National Education, Health, and Allied Workers' Union (Nehawu) was not present at the meeting, the Health Department said unions were well represented by leadership from Nehawu, the Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa, National Union Of Public Service & Allied Workers, Public Servants Association of South Africa, South African Medical Association Trade Union and Health & Other Services Personnel Trade Union of South Africa. In a statement released following the meeting, the Health Department said there was clear common ground between government and unions that a zero tolerance stance will be adopted regarding the availability of PPE to all health care workers. The department reiterated that there is enough PPE stock in the country but acknowledged that the issues pertain to the movement and distribution or redistribution of stock. "Based on all the above, it should be clear to all that the primary protection of health workers is a matter on which we will all agree, with no exception. Our approach must therefore be to support the simple ethos: no PPE, no work. "We believe that this should motivate management and labour to ensure there is not a situation where someone declines to work. It is unfair to put any worker in such an invidious position," the department said. While all parties noted an improvement in the situation since concerns around PPE were initially raised, the Minister has directed that the availability of PPE needs to be jointly monitored on a daily basis at all facilities. To gain deeper understanding of the issues on the ground, the Minister sampled a number of institutions where there have been complaints and subjected those to investigations. The department has adopted the strict principle, with immediate effect, that only a report verified jointly by a functional Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) committee will be taken as the final resolution. "As far as the national department is now concerned, any unattended problems will automatically mean that the OHS committee is non-existent or non-functional, and as such, there is non-compliance with legislation. This will invite decisive consequence management. "To ensure that parties engage on the same basis, unions will have direct access to information contained on the department's web-based dashboard and digital stock visibility system," said the department. This will enable unions, together with management, to conduct daily audits at facility level. It will easily allow for tracking of granular details such as sizes available, quantity and evidence of quality assurance. "This will be very important, as issues of monitoring PPE should best be managed on the ground. Similarly, issues of transportation and distribution of PPE should be managed by the same committees at facility and district level." The department also highlighted that a common understanding needs to be brokered in regards to the use of PPE in various work settings. To this end, the meeting recommended that the Ministerial Advisory Committee on COVID-19 collate information from all stakeholders and issue an advisory that can be acceptable to all parties and applied across all provinces. This will also provide an opportunity for any revisions that need to be considered, based on feedback from health workers. Caring for health workers Mechanisms to enhance support for health care workers, who become infected, need to be strengthened. "It will be

important to provide a service that encompasses pre-test counselling, post-test counselling, quarantine/isolation support and support for those who fall ill,” said the department. The meeting agreed that there has to be consistency in the implementation of these provisions to address the concerns of the unions...