

MEDIA RELEASE COVID-19: PSA concerned about rising infection of health workers

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EMBARGO None

ENQUIRIES communication@psa.co.za

The Public Servants Association (PSA) is extremely concerned about the alarming increase in the number of COVID-19 infections amongst health workers. The PSA has noted that one of the contributing factors is that the Command Council does not consider the work done by the Provincial Occupational Health and Safety Committee of the Gauteng Department of Health, headed by Professor Mkhululi Lukhele.

The PSA, through the Steering Committee and referring to Circulars 7 and 18 of 2020 issued by Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA), requested that Professor Lukhele responds to eight questions on the procurement of personal protective equipment (PPE). This was required after the PSA learned that the MEC of Health, Dr Bandile Masuku, requested donations of PPE. Furthermore, there are widespread complaints regarding the availability of PPE, incorrect PPE being distributed to facilities, and the rise of employees contracting COVID-19. The lack of collaborative work has opened a gap for managers not to adhere to established departmental protocols, through the Occupational Health and Safety Committee. Health workers are exposed by managers to the high possibility of infections. The Chief Director of Occupational Health and Safety, Dr Senabe who sits in the Command Council, has instructed managers to stop using the decontamination (fogging) services and that cleaners should clean areas where employees have tested positive. The PSA finds this action contrary to the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and COVID-19 regulations issued by the Department of Employment and Labour.

The rise of infections at hospitals such as Helen Joseph, Dr Yusuf Dadoo, Leratong, Charlotte Maxeke Academic, Weskoppies and Tara as well as in the Johannesburg District Health Services predicts a disaster, not only for healthcare workers, but also for patients and communities utilising these healthcare services.

The PSA calls on the MEC of Health, Dr Bandile Masuku, to provide clear guidelines on how healthcare workers will be protected against managers who fail to comply with regulations. The PSA will approach the Inspectorate of Labour, to visit institutions that are deemed not compliant in accordance with DPSA Circular 18 of 2020 and regulations issued by the Department of Employment and Labour.

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