

MEDIA RELEASE: **COVID-19: PSA condemns Newcastle Provincial Hospital's conduct**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is shocked by the lethargic behaviour of the Newcastle Provincial Hospital in KwaZulu-Natal, after a Ward Clerk tested positive for COVID-19.

Management was informed of the positive results and tested other employees and nurses from both Gynae and Post Natal Wards who were in some way in contact with the Ward Clerk. The employees were, however, told that they are at low risk and must continue reporting for duty whilst waiting their test results.

The PSA believes that the Hospital's actions are endangering the lives of employees, their families and patients. What is even more concerning is that these nurses are working in the labour and nursery wards, which endangers the lives of babies and expectant mothers, which could lead to litigation. The PSA also learnt that a Matron who had tested for COVID-19 was rushed to Majuba Lodge on 23 June 2020 to be quarantined. This reckless behaviour is against the Health Protocol, which dictates that approval should be granted in accordance with Public Service Regulation 51 for all employees who worked closely with the affected employee to self-quarantine for 14 days. Disinfection of the affected workplace must also be facilitated.

The PSA has on numerous occasions advised the Department of Health to comply with lockdown regulations and the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, which place legal obligation on the employer to provide an environment that is safe and without risk for all employees. The Hospital management's actions are inconsistent with directives and guidelines on dealing with COVID-19 cases in the workplace. Not adhering to regulations can have severe implications as files and other working tools could be contaminated and spread the virus to patients and staff. These irresponsible actions are putting the staff and patients at a high and undue risk of infections. The Hospital's management seems oblivious to the impact of the COVID-19 and the increase of infections in health workers.

The PSA calls upon the MEC and HOD of KZN Health to ensure consequence management for this irresponsible action, which is tantamount to premeditated murder. The Hospital's affected wards must be immediately be temporarily closed, decontaminated and all employees should be tested. Those who worked closely with infected staff must be quarantined immediately. The Hospital management's decision to allow exposed employees to continue working whilst waiting for their test results is a dangerous gamble with lives.

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