

MEDIA RELEASE Health Ombudsman report on Northern Cape hospitals: PSA denounces systemic negligence

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is outraged and extremely concerned following scathing findings by the Health Ombudsman regarding appalling conditions at the Northern Cape Mental Health Hospital and the Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe Hospital in Kimberley in the Northern Cape.

The report reveals gross negligence, institutional mismanagement, and a collapse of oversight that have cost patients their lives and placed frontline health workers in an environment that undermines professional ethics and safety. The Ombudsman confirmed the preventable deaths of Cyprian Mohoto and Tsepo Mdimbaza, both of whom succumbed to hypothermia owing to failures in basic infrastructure and care. The lack of heating, insufficient bedding, broken windows, and exposed wiring in winter months, combined with substandard clothing procured through questionable contracts, point to a system that is dysfunctional and dangerous. These deaths are not isolated incidents and are symptoms of a failing provincial health system marred by a leadership vacuum, poor governance, and disregard for constitutional obligations.

The PSA denounces the failure to uphold the most basic standards of health care, including proper supervision, documentation, patient monitoring, and interdisciplinary communication. The routine violation of Health Professions Council of South Africa and South African Nursing Council guidelines, along with a five-year absence of a functional linen management system, signals a health department in crisis. The fact that junior and inexperienced staff members were left to make life-or-death decisions without oversight is indefensible.

The PSA demands urgent action from the Northern Cape MEC for Health, starting with the immediate investigation. The PSA further calls for the deployment of skilled medical and nursing professionals to stabilise services, emergency repairs to infrastructure, termination of exploitative procurement contracts, and criminal investigations into those responsible for inflating costs and delivering substandard services. A permanent quality assurance and clinical governance team must be appointed within three months.

This situation is a gross violation of patients' constitutional rights to dignity, life, and access to health care. The PSA calls on Minister of Health, the Portfolio Committee on Health, and the Office of the Public Protector to urgently intervene and ensure full compliance with the Ombudsman's recommendations. All healthcare staff must be equipped on risk management, care planning, documentation, and handover procedures, with accredited training in life support and psychiatric care. The PSA will not tolerate another life lost owing to government neglect. Accountability is overdue and public healthcare must serve the people, not betray them.

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