

MEDIA RELEASE **COVID-19: Polokwane Hospital endangering workers, PSA calls for immediate temporary closure**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is shocked by the lethargic behaviour by Polokwane Hospital, after a nurse, who was working night shift, tested positive for COVID-19. The infected nurse tested on his own and informed Management of the positive result. However, Management drew blood from the nurses who came in contact with him and told them that they are low risk and must continue reporting to work. Subsequently, another nurse who was working the same shift with the nurse who tested positive for the virus, started to show symptoms. It appears that the hospital is waiting for all nurses to be infected before they do anything, which does not only put the employees lives in danger, but that of their families as well.

This reckless behaviour is against the Health Protocol, that 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 a period of 14 days to ensure that the infection does not spread. Furthermore, the disinfection of the affected workplace must be facilitated. The hospital management is oblivious to the impact of the COVID-19 and the increase of infections in health workers country-wide, hence they treated this case as business as usual.

The PSA immediately brought this to the attention of management, indicating that their actions are inconsistent with the directives and guidelines, as directed on dealing with COVID-19 cases in the workplace. It must be noted that the PSA has on numerous occasions sensitized the Department of Health to comply with the lockdown regulations and the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, which places legal obligation on the employer to provide an environment that is safe and without risk for all employees. Not adhering to the regulations can have severe implications as files and other working tools could be contaminated and spread to patients and staff. These irresponsible actions are putting the staff and patients at a high and undue risk of infections.

The PSA calls upon the MEC of Health to ensure consequence management for this irresponsible and dangerous omission, which can cause a health hazard to the employees and their families. This is tantamount to premeditated murder as management should know better than to risk employees' lives. Furthermore, the hospital must be temporarily closed effective immediately, decontaminated and all employees should be tested. Those who worked closely with the affected nurse must be quarantined immediately. It is inconsiderate for management to ignore the danger of the virus and to allow the employees to continue working, whilst waiting for the results despite the positive case.

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