

MEDIA RELEASE	PSA alarmed by KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health's attempt to downplay serious challenges faced by Department
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The Public Servants Association (PSA) strongly condemns the reckless, misleading, and insensitive remarks made by the spokesperson for the KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Health during an interview on a national radio station on 7 April 2025.

The Department's attempt to downplay or deny the serious and ongoing shortage of medication at public healthcare facilities is disingenuous, dangerous, and an affront to the health professionals, patients, and communities that depend on these services. The PSA continues to receive a growing number of grievances from Union members at health facilities at rural clinics to major hospitals across KwaZulu-Natal from Vryheid to Durban. Complaints paint a grim, undeniable picture of the current crisis, which involves the chronic shortages of essential medication and staff. For the Department's spokesperson to publicly deny these issues without consulting frontline pharmacists, healthcare workers, or administrative staff is misleading and irresponsible.

Public healthcare workers, including doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and support staff, are the subject of intimidation, victimisation, and abuse by an autocratic leadership. Toxic workplace environments are rife, with disciplinary action being used for bullying, silencing dissent, and union-busting. The current structure of leadership supports a system where autocratic managers and acting CEOs in various facilities, including Victoria Mxenge Hospital, Inkosi Albert Luthuli Hospital, Vryheid Hospital, Benedictine Hospital, and many more favour those who are bullying whilst suppressing the voices of the oppressed. One such example is the inhumane treatment and removal of the late Dr Idika from Vryheid District Hospital. Despite the PSA winning his case, the Department continued to target him. He endured more than five years of abuse, frivolous charges, and demotion, all of which took an enormous toll on his mental health.

In February 2024, a medical doctor serving community service at Benedictine Hospital tragically took his own life following bullying, isolation, and the threat of losing his professional medical certificate. Rather than being supported or informed of his rights, he was left vulnerable in a hostile work environment. This devastating incident underscores the mental-health crisis amongst healthcare professionals and exposes the Department's consistent failure to foster a culture of dignity, safety, and support. For the Department to defend leadership structures that perpetuate such abuse proves that it is detached from the reality faced by frontline workers.

The PSA is alarmed by reports of extensive abuse and unjust disciplinary actions. These include incidents at Prince Mshiyeni Memorial Hospital where 28 ICU employees were charged under questionable and oppressive circumstances. Doctors and support staff face systemic intimidation and are subjected to disciplinary measures aimed at silencing dissent at Dr Pixley Ka Isaka Seme Hospital, Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital, and other hospitals.

At many institutions, disciplinary processes have been used to instead of ensuring accountability, suppress workers, deter whistleblowing, and undermine union representation. The PSA demands that this toxic culture must

end to avoid the total collapse of the healthcare system. The PSA demands an immediate public apology and full retraction of the misleading statements made by the Department's spokesperson. The PSA further demands immediate consultation with qualified pharmacists and health administrators across the province to verify and address medicine and staff shortages. An independent and transparent investigation into the suicide of the doctors at Benedictine Hospital is required along with the immediate implementation of comprehensive mental-health support systems for all staff. An urgent inquiry into the abuse and death of Dr Idika is required, including a thorough review of the Department's handling of this case. The PSA also demands the removal of the Department's spokesperson for failing to uphold the values of integrity, professionalism, and compassion. The Union further calls for a legal review of the Department's decision to withdraw cough mixtures and an assessment of the broader impact on public health.

The PSA calls on the South African Human Rights Commission, the Public Protector, and the Department of Employment and Labour to urgently intervene and investigate systemic violations in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health. This public-health crisis has escalated to a human rights and governance crisis. The PSA urges all healthcare workers facing abuse, bullying, or mental distress to contact the PSA for support and to seek help from mental health professionals. The PSA will continue the Union's efforts for public servants, including those whose voices have been silenced by poor leadership and a collapsing system.

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