

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**PSA calls for immediate temporary closure of WF Knobel Hospital**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is gravely concerned regarding the safety of the employees at WF Knobel Hospital, in the Moletjie area in Limpopo. This after an employee tested positive for COVID-19, wherein the employer became aware of the results on 1 June and could not act swiftly and in accordance with Safety Protocol and Directives. The Hospital Management contravened the DPSA Circular 7/2020, which directs that where an employee tests positive for COVID-19, such an employee must be granted sick leave, in accordance with Public Service Regulation 51 for all employees who worked closely with the affected employee, to be self-quarantined for a period of 14 days to ensure the infection does not spread, facilitate the disinfection of the affected workplaces and report the case to the DPSA.

Upon being alerted of this gross negligence, the PSA engaged the employer, where it was confirmed that employees were screened and that the matter was reported to the District Office for further guidance. Sadly, whilst the hospital waits for the District Office's guidance, employees were allowed to work with patients and colleagues without knowing their status, which poses a risk in cross infection as their status is unknown. The Directive is very clear, that as a precaution, employees must be isolated for 14 days which the employer ignored. The PSA demanded the immediate removal of the workers that worked closely with the affected employees; however, the employer did not accede to such demand for the reasons best known to them. The PSA is concerned that the employer is oblivious of the impact of the virus and shows no commitment to ensure its containment, particularly that the same attitude was recently portrayed by the Pietersburg Hospital Management. It seems to be the modus operandi of the Department of Health which exposes the front-line workers to the risk of being infected by the virus.

The PSA condemns the decision by the employer for failing to follow the necessary guidelines to protect workers and patients. The PSA has on several committee meetings with the employer raised a concern about inconsistency of handling COVID-19 infections of employees. It must be noted that the PSA has on numerous occasions cautioned the employer to comply with the lockdown regulations and the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, which places the 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 that immediate safety measures are adhered to. Furthermore, that the hospital be temporary closed with immediate effect, to allow for decontamination, as well as the testing of all employees who were in contact with the infected employee and start the process of contact tracing. Those who worked with the infected employee must offered counselling and be quarantined immediately. It is inconsiderate for the employer to ignore the danger of the virus and to allow employees to continue working, without testing them by following the necessary guidelines. The MEC must ensure that the Hospital and District Management as well as Hospital Compliance Officer are held responsible for their failure to perform their duties in the fight against the pandemic and endangering the lives of the innocent people.

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