

MEDIA RELEASE

PSA concerned on response to COVID-19 in the Eastern Cape

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), is concerned regarding the lack of urgency displayed by the Eastern Cape Health Department, in its response to challenges faced by front-line workers in the province during this COVID-19 pandemic. During these past few weeks, the province has been hit by demonstrations by front-line workers owing to their distress caused by the increase in the infection rates amongst health workers, including the passing of a Matron in Bhisho, owing to complications from the virus.

The PSA feels that this loss of life, could have been avoided if the employer took care of employees with communicable ailments, a matter the PSA raised with the employer on several engagements. The department instead of responding to genuine challenges faced by its employees', has now resorted to issuing letters of disciplinary hearings to staff members, which the PSA views as an unfortunate and rash decision in these trying times. Currently the Frere Hospital, in East London has been slapped with a Prohibition Notice in terms of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHS Act)*. The Department of Labour ordered the shutdown of a tertiary institution, which has recently been designated to care for COVID-19 patients. Some of the issues that have led to demonstrations include, the lack of risk assessment and training of Staff about COVID-19, nurses who are working in both the COVID-19 and ordinary wards, - thus exposing other staff members and patients and a lack of proper access control. Theses are just a few of the issues that the Health Department has failed to tackle.

The PSA will be urging the department to strictly adhere to *OHS Act* and work speedily with Department of Labour to avoid any action, which will have a detrimental effect not only to the employees but on the whole Eastern Cape community.

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