

<b>MEDIA RELEASE</b>	<b>PSA concerned regarding non-compliance with COVID-19 Regulations: 2 Military Hospital</b>
<b>DATE</b>	22 May 2020
<b>EMBARGO</b>	None
<b>ENQUIRIES</b>	communication@psa.co.za

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), is concerned regarding non-compliance to COVID-19 regulations at the 2 Military Hospital Wynberg after a cleaner, who had access to the Nurses' Home as well as the hospital, tested positive for COVID-19. Cleaners work on a rotational basis between the nurses' home and hospital and to the PSA's understanding, all that was done was a mere debriefing with the cleaners. At this debriefing, the cleaners were told to keep quiet about the infected worker. The official working with the cleaner was however, not placed under quarantine, or tested. Areas frequented by the cleaners have also not deep cleaned or sanitised.

The non-compliance with set protocols, and required interventions, at a health institution, is of grave concern to the PSA. The protocols for the whole of the Public Service, requires that where an official tests positive for COVID-19, such a person must be sent home and granted sick leave, the necessary OHS risk assessment must also be done, to determine how and where the person got infected to protect the institution and the officials working there.

Other employees who worked closely with the infected employee, must also be sent home to self-isolate for a period of 14 days to ensure that the infection doesn't spread. According to information at our disposal, none of the above measures have been applied and this is a contravention of the COVID-19 regulations and other prescripts.

Following failed attempts by the PSA to engage the Hospital on the matter, the PSA requested that an Inspector of the Department of Employment and Labour, be sent to 2 Military Hospital to investigate. On 11 May, another positive case was identified and the Hospital Pharmacy. It was later established that only the Pharmacy area was cleaned, but not the surrounding offices and toilettes within the same workspace area. Furthermore, the non-military staff members, working in that section, were not informed, and traced to determine potential contact with an infected individual. On 13 May 2020, yet another positive case was identified in the theatre. It was also reported that a patient who tested positive, was driven around to various areas in the hospital, without the driver being issued proper PPE, as required when dealing with positive cases, the driver also came into contact with different personnel in those areas.

Cleaners and administration staff from Ward 9, where patients who tested positive for Covid-19 are being treated, are only given masks, gloves, and plastic aprons, whereas the uniformed nursing staff is issued with a special PPE suits and shoes. A patient died at 2 Military Hospital owing to COVID-19 and the cleaners were told to clean the bedding and area where the patient died, without extra PPE. Civilian staff were told that they do not need the special PPE because they don't work with patients.

It is the PSA's contention that whether civilian staff work with the patients directly or not, they are exposed to the virus, by cleaning the ward and the beds where patients who are infected, are treated. It is a known fact that the virus survives on surfaces, for up to 72 hours, thus exposing our members to the risk of becoming infected when performing duties, in high infection risk areas, without full protective gear as is required for health workers.

On 21 May, the PSA, accompanied by Chief inspector of Labour visited the hospital, for an inspection and to investigate the PSA's complaints. The delegation was however prohibited from entering the hospital by armed soldiers. The guards informed the PSA, that they were specifically instructed not to allow the Union or labour officials to enter the premises. This is not the first occasion where the Commanding Officer of the hospital has given unlawful instructions to PSAP members at the workplace, including compelling them to work on public holidays and weekends without compensation, during lockdown level-5. The PSA with the assistance of our Federation, FEDUSA, will be taking the matter further. We strongly condemn the Department of Defence's appalling disregard for Occupational Health and Safety measures, that are set to safeguard employees, in particular at a health institution, where the health and safety of staff and patients should be paramount.

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