

MEDIA RELEASE                      **COVID-19: PSA demands withdrawal of charges against KZN Department of Health EMS employees**

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EMBARGO                                None

ENQUIRIES                              communication@psa.co.za

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) has condemned disciplinary action instituted against Emergency Medical Services (EMS) employees Grey's Hospital EMS Base in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN).

The employees were on duty doing nightshift starting from 19:00 and were informed by the night shift supervisor that a patient in Northdale Area of Pietermaritzburg tested positive for COVID-19 and had to be transported to hospital by ambulance. The employees raised serious concerns with the supervisor as there was no personal protective equipment supplied. They also raised concern about the fact that they never received training on handling COVID-19 patients. This training should have been conducted on 25 March 2020. The nightshift supervisor failed to provide the employees with answers and protective gear used for a COVID-19 patient and called in a District Manager. The District Manager arrived at 22:00 and deliberated with employees but did not provide the required gear. Instead, the decision was taken to charge all eight employees for failing to take a lawful instruction. This action is against the commitment by the Minister of Health, Dr Zweli Mkhize, during a recent meeting with the PSA whereby no Health worker can be coerced to perform any function without the necessary protective clothing. The Minister further indicated that employees should be guided by the standard operating procedures that direct the specific personal protective equipment required for certain areas of work.

The PSA thus disputes that the instruction was lawful and rather regards it as unreasonable and irresponsible. The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health EMS is in contravention of section 8(1) of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* when subjecting employees to clear health risks without providing the required protective equipment. Such actions furthermore undermine effort to flatten the curve of COVID-19 infections. By exposing employees, the health and safety of their families and members of the public are also at risk.

The PSA condemns the reckless behaviour by the KZN EMS management. The PSA calls upon the Head of Department and the MEC to immediately withdraw the charges against the eight officials, failing which the PSA will not hesitate to lay criminal charges against the Department for blatant contravention of the *OHSA* and *Disaster Management Act*.

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