

MEDIA RELEASE. PSA not entirely in agreement with Health Ombud ruling on KwaZulu-Natal healthcare workers deaths

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), is profoundly disappointed and concerned regarding the findings of the Health Ombud that reportedly ruled out workplace bullying as a contributing factor in the tragic deaths of healthcare workers at healthcare facilities in KwaZulu-Natal. Whilst the PSA acknowledges the important role played by the Health Ombud in investigating complaints within the healthcare sector, the Union believes that the conclusion risks overlooking the devastating impact that toxic workplace environments, intimidation, victimisation, harassment, excessive workloads, and poor management practices have on the mental health and wellbeing of public servants.

The PSA is also of the opinion that the PSA should have also been approached for proposals and comment on the issue. Public healthcare workers continue to operate under immense pressure. Chronic staff shortages, resource constraints, increasing patient loads, unrealistic performance expectations, and inadequate psychosocial support have created working conditions that leave many employees vulnerable to severe emotional and psychological distress. Workplace bullying is often subtle, systemic, and difficult to prove, yet its consequences can be devastating.

The PSA has, over many years, represented members who have been subjected to intimidation, victimisation, unfair disciplinary action, abuse of authority, and hostile management practices. These experiences have demonstrated that workplace bullying remains a serious occupational health and safety concern that should never be underestimated or dismissed without careful consideration of all available evidence. The PSA is concerned that these findings may discourage employees from reporting bullying and harassment for fear that their experiences will not be recognised or taken seriously. Every allegation of workplace bullying deserves a thorough, independent, and transparent investigation, supported by occupational health, psychological, and labour relations expertise.

The PSA calls on the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health to strengthen mechanisms for preventing workplace bullying by, developing and enforcing comprehensive anti-bullying policies, providing confidential reporting channels and protection against victimisation, offering accessible counselling and employee wellness services, training managers to identify and address workplace harassment appropriately, as well as ensuring that Occupational Health and Safety Committees actively monitor psychosocial risks in the workplace; and holding managers accountable where bullying, harassment, or abuse of authority is established. The PSA further urges the Department to prioritise the mental health of healthcare workers by creating safe, respectful, and supportive workplaces where employees can raise concerns without fear of retaliation.



Healthcare workers dedicate their lives to caring for the people of South Africa. They deserve workplaces that protect not only their physical safety but also their dignity, mental wellbeing, and constitutional right to fair labour practices. The PSA remains committed to defending the rights, dignity, and wellbeing of all public servants and will continue advocating for healthy, safe, and respectful workplaces throughout the public service.

ENDS

