INFORMUS

COVID-19: Newcastle Provincial Hospital
PSA calls for immediate temporary closure and decontamination of the Gynae and Post Natal wards

The PSA is shocked by the lethargic behaviour displayed at Newcastle Provincial Hospital, after an employee tested positive for COVID-19. After the infected employee received positive results, management was informed of the incident. It is reported that management tested other employees and nurses from both the Gynae and Post Natal Wards, who came into contact with the infected employee. Employees were informed that they were not at risk and must continue reporting to work whilst waiting for the results. Members reported to the PSA that they were seriously concerned that they might have also contracted the virus and could infect others whilst waiting for the results.

The PSA condemns the hospital for not following the proper protocols when a person has become infected. These matters are considered serious, as nurses currently work in the labour and nursery wards respectively, which might endanger the lives of innocent infants and expectant mothers which might lead to litigation. The PSA has also learned that a Matron who had tested for COVID-19 received her results and was hurriedly rushed into quarantine. This reckless behaviour is against health protocols, that dictate that approval should be granted in accordance with Public Service Regulation 51, for all employees who worked closely with the affected employee to self-quarantine for a period of 14 days, to ensure that the infection does not spread. In addition, the disinfection of the workplace must be facilitated.

The PSA wishes to bring this to the attention of management, indicating that their actions are inconsistent with the directives and guidelines, as directed in dealing with COVID-19 cases in the workplace. It must be noted that the PSA has on numerous occasions sensitised the Department of Health to comply with the lockdown regulations and the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, which places a 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 placing the staff and patients at a high and undue risk of infections. The hospital management is oblivious to the impact of the COVID-19 and the increase in infections of health workers country-wide. This case is being as managed as business as usual.

The PSA calls on the MEC and HOD of Health to ensure that drastic action is taken against those responsible. Furthermore, the wards affected wards must be temporarily closed and immediately

decontaminated and all employees should be tested. Those who worked closely with the affected nurse and have been tested must be quarantined immediately. It is inconsiderate for management to ignore the threat of the virus and allow the employees to continue working, whilst waiting for the results despite the positive case being identified.

Members can report workplace COVID-19 non-compliance and concerns to Zamani Nhlangulela on 071 681 3105.

<u>GENERAL MANAGER</u>