

We swear by the Hippocratic Oath

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"I swear by Apollo the physician, and Asclepius, and Hygieia and Panacea and all the gods and goddesses as my witnesses, that, according to my ability and judgement, I will keep this Oath and this contract..." These are the opening words to the Hippocratic Oath to which all medical doctors swear upon on admission into the practice of medicine.

It was this oath which led the MEC for Health and Head of Department (HoD) in KwaZulu-Natal health department; Drs Sibongiseni Dhlomo and Sibongile Zungu, respectively to don their coats and visit patients over the weekend and during week as most health care workers were on strike.

"The Hippocratic Oath describes a promise to try not to harm anyone" says the MEC.

Over the weekend the Head of Department visited a number of hospitals in the Pietermaritzburg area, including some of the psychiatric hospitals. When she found most patients left unattended she called on the assistance of more people to come and help with feeding of patients, cleaning of wards and changing of linen.

During the visit the HoD noted; "In these situations, the enjoyment of individual human rights and civil liberties may have to be weighed against public interest. However, efforts to protect individual rights and public interests become our obligation. As we seek to balance competing interests and values, we draw on ethical principles as tools for weighing conflicting claims and for reaching appropriate decisions."

On the other side the MEC worked the night at King Edward VIII Hospital attending to maternity cases, feeding patients and doing the general assistant's and nurse's work in the hospital. The hospital also has a number of South African Military Health Services (SAMHS) personnel deployed to assist those in need of care at this hospital.

"The delivery of health care is changing. Health practitioners are under increasing public scrutiny to reflect the changing times. People perceive health care to be less than optimal when the psycho-social needs of the person are not met. People now expect healthcare systems and practitioners to assume a holistic approach, where the person is viewed and respected as a whole person. These are the considerations we need to take seriously in the delivery chain and most importantly respect for patients and their rights" said the MEC.

The general picture of the strike is that all clinical staff (doctors) are at work whilst nurses, clerks and general assistants have joined the strike. Currently there are 72 SAMHS deployed in the province to provide healthcare services. These are mainly deployed in the Durban area where the strike is largely felt. A further 60 members are to arrive to add to those currently in the province.

On Saturday (21/08/2010) the provincial government applied for and was granted an interdict against striking workers. The interdict prevents protesters from intimidating patients and workers from entering hospitals and clinics. It also draws the picket line at 50 meters from all access gates into and from hospitals.

Following the interdict the department has seen some hospitals reporting a return to 'some level of normality' with nurses, in particular, returning back to work.



MEC visiting a patient at Northdale hospital



MEC with SAMHS personnel at Mahatma Gandhi Memorial hospital

Ends

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Pictures by: Themba Mngomezulu