

TO: ALL MEDIA
DATE: 09 OCTOBER 2011
EMBARGO: NONE

Media statement: 'NHI will fight the uncontrolled commercialisation of a public good' - Dr Motsoaledi

Today, the Minister of Health Dr Aaron Motsoaledi has called on general practitioners to work with the department in protecting the constitutional right of citizens to basic healthcare.

The Minister is in Durban to engage general practitioners, in particular, on the National Health Insurance (NHI) following the release of the Green Paper on the NHI. He told the packed hall that in 2008 the World Health Report identified three trends that undermine health outcomes globally. These, he said, were; hospital centrism which has a strong curative approach, fragmentation in approach which may be related to programmes or service delivery and uncontrolled commercialism which undermines principles of health as a public good.

"The first heart transplant in the world was done at a public health facility, Groote Schuur Hospital but today one has to be extremely poor to go to that hospital. I met Lord Nigel Crisp who asked why is it that every person who is sick in South Africa wishes to go to a private hospital when most of your people are poorer than people in the United Kingdom.

"So, we cannot allow the commercialisation of a public good hence we are introducing the NHI," Minister Motsoaledi said.

The Minister is on a public engagement road show visiting various Provinces and engaging healthcare professions. Today he landed in KwaZulu-Natal where he is meeting General Practitioners as part of the engagement process on the NHI.

Minister Motsoaledi told the meeting that the cost drivers of healthcare costs are hospitals and specialists. "Out of the R84 billion healthcare expenditure; R31.1 billion goes to private hospitals, R19 goes to specialists and R14 billion goes to pharmaceuticals, R6,2 billion goes to GPs and the only the remainder is for public healthcare and non-medical expenses."

The Minister also shared figures of the price disparities in the male circumcision prices from three hospitals groups where the prices range between R600 and R13 880. "I have in my possession a letter from the WHO official, an Assistant Director in the African Region, who was charged R30 000 for peri-anal abscess asking me what country is South Africa with such exorbitant prices. Another patient was charged R500 000 for a laparotomy and a further R700 000 for a repeat laparotomy and later died."

The Minister said that government will not fold its arms when there is such rampant commercialisation in the healthcare sector. Some of the prices, he continued, we will not charge even when we start doing brain surgeries.

"How can we run such a brutal system?" Minister asked. Minister made a call and invited the general practitioners to engage with the NHI development process in the interest of assuring the constitutional right of all citizens.

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