

TO: ALL MEDIA
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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement from the KZN Health Department on SAHRC investigation into Addington Oncology Machines

The Department of Health in KwaZulu Natal welcomes an investigation by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) into the Department's decision to halt operation of its two radiotherapy machines at Durban's Addington Hospital earlier this year.

"This investigation would afford the Department an opportunity to place the matter into perspective and address allegations that it had compromised patients' lives. As a Health Department our mandate is to save lives and improve health care delivery using ethical practices and available resources. Our decision to halt the use of the machines followed lengthy internal investigations into the procurement process involving the machines and the service provider in question. Our investigations later led to state agencies being called in to address our findings so that the matter could be dealt with legally. Unfortunately delays in the prosecution process meant the Department could not allow millions of rands in losses being incurred pending finality on the matter. Prior to halting the use of the machines pending the legal outcome on the matter, we put into place measures to ensure that patient services, particularly in the sensitive field of oncology, would not be compromised.

These included the free transportation of our patients to other state health facilities to continue their treatment and prioritising urgent cases which is normal practice at every state health facility where we are faced with resource and skills constraints. This would have been the normal practise at Addington Hospital even prior to the machines being halted. Despite this, the matter has, unfortunately, been misunderstood by some and taken out of context by others who sought to exploit the issue for their own agendas. Due to the legal implications of the case, the Department is not in a position to further expand on the reasons for its decision through the media at this stage. However, the SAHRC investigation would allow the Department to furnish such details to the organisation so that the investigations can be conducted with all facts and information at its disposal. As a Department we remain committed to improving the lives of all South Africans and look forward to engaging with the SAHRC on the issue," said KZN Head of Department, Dr Sibongile Zungu.

Ends.