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KZN Health MEC concerned by continued spate of criminal attacks on paramedics and other Health care workers

KWAZULU-NATAL Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has expressed shock regarding acts of criminality visited upon health professionals. The MEC has called on the public to help protect paramedics by reporting any acts of crime against this cadre of health care workers, who always go out of their way to save lives in any community, regardless of the time of day.

This follows the attempted hijacking of an Emergency Medical Services crew at Slangspruit in Pietermaritzburg on Saturday night (11 February 2017).

It is alleged that the two-person crew had been responding to a distress phone call from a maternity patient - whom they ultimately could not find - when they were approached by four men and a woman.

It is alleged that two men from the group confronted the crew on both the passenger and driver's doors, demanding that they open up the ambulance. It is alleged that The group claimed that one of them had been injured and needed medical attention.

When the crew member informed them that the EMS vehicle had been dispatched for a maternity case, one of the men allegedly jumped onto the crash bar of the vehicle and deliberately broke the windscreen.

The driver of the EMS vehicle then drove off with the man holding on to it.

When the vehicle reached a set of traffic lights, some by-standers witnessed what was happening and pulled the man off the vehicle, subdued him before allegedly assaulting him.

The EMS crew drove towards its base, when they came across a SAPS vehicle and summoned help.

Reacting to the incident, MEC Dhlomo said: "We are deeply concerned by the space of incidents in recent months whereby health care workers leave their workplace in their quest to bring much-needed emergency health care to our communities, but instead fall victim to crime. It is an extremely worrying trend, because it affects our ability to fulfil our core Godly mandate, which is to save lives. Such attacks on health workers and government property should be condemned by all, as they could result in paramedics refusing to go to certain area. That is when people will start dying, as paramedics and other health workers refuse to go to certain troubled communities. This entire situation is foreign to us. Even during the days that we were fighting apartheid; nurses and ambulances were never attacked. Instead they would be given safe passage and protected to attend to those shot by the enemy."

MEC Dhlomo urged the community to protect paramedics, healthcare professionals and all other state workers and property.

"If the public could be more alert and be eyes and ears of the police and hand over to the police any information that they might have on incidents of crime that are being planned, or those that have occurred, we can then begin to arrest this troublesome trend."

However, MEC issued a warning against vigilantism. "While what was done by members of the community in apprehending the suspect is to be commended, we would like to warn the public not to take the law in their own hands."