

RK Khan patient refused to be treated by a black nurse and is ungrateful for good hospital treatment, says KZN Health MEC

KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has strongly criticised a patient from RK Khan Hospital who is alleged to have refused to be treated by a Black nurse.

Despite continuing to receive an appropriate level of care while being treated at the hospital for his stab wounds over the past three weeks, following a hijacking on 28 December 2016, the same patient has also released a series of videos on social media, taken from inside the hospital.

Although he is still in the care of the hospital, in one of the videos, the patient can be heard making disparaging remarks about the state of the hospital buildings.

Among these claims are that:

- He allegedly did not receive urgent attention;
- He allegedly went into cardiac arrest while waiting for treatment;
- His stab wound was allegedly sometimes left open, without the necessary dressing, exposing him to possible infection; and
- Parts of the hospital were dirty.

Following the patient's claims, MEC Dhlomo personally went to RK Khan yesterday (18 January 2017), where he met hospital management, received a briefing and checked the patient's clinical records. To his shock, the MEC found that none of the patient's claims were true. Instead, MEC Dhlomo was informed by hospital staff that the patient had displayed a racist attitude.

"All of these allegations... are coming in from someone who's extremely ungrateful if you consider the extent of his injuries... the laceration on his arm before coming to this hospital.

"We've heard him making comments to our staff members that he doesn't want to be treated by Black nurses. He's either in the wrong country and wrong hospital. In this hospital we don't have the luxury where patients can choose which healthcare professional can treat them. If he chooses health professionals of a different race, then he's in the wrong hospital because here we don't discriminate. Any nurse, any doctor, no matter what colour, can see any patient, including this patient. He must take that. If he is not happy with that, he must make up his mind... that he's in the wrong hospital. But we are not going to change that policy of our government, whereby all our healthcare professionals look after all of our patients, regardless of colour, creed or race.

"I have gleaned through the hospital records, showing what was done after he arrived at this hospital on the 28th of December. And I'm satisfied that within two hours of arriving, he was already in theatre with his injuries. And doctors were actually looking very carefully at the injuries that were there looking carefully on nerves, blood vessels including tendons. They really did the best they could under the circumstances.

"Being a doctor myself, if anyone was to say they had a cardiac arrest, and live to tell the story... it doesn't happen. It doesn't exist. Cardiac arrest means your heart stops beating. And when your heart stops beating, you die. You are not there to tell a story.

"It is not uncommon to have wounds that have been made dirty by deep lacerations to be left open. As part of managing that wound, you clean it up, but you don't close it so that you can see and actually allow it to get more dirty out... the next day and the day after. Secondly, it is normal practice that if you are in a surgical ward... as doctors when we are doing ward rounds, there's a nurse who goes ahead of the team to open up the wounds open.. Of course cover them slightly with the gauze, so that when the doctor comes there to see the patient one by one, you don't start afresh to undo the

bandages. You just see the wound, make a decision, clean it up again and continue.

“I am satisfied that the managers of this institution... the clinical managers of this hospital... have not done anything that is clinically wrong. This patient has actually received the best of the best hospital care, if you consider the extent of his injuries. And I repeat, he’s extremely ungrateful. He should actually find a better service elsewhere. He’s free to choose the hospital that’s going to treat him as a white man, and get a white nurse, or a white doctor to look after him. We don’t have that luxury in this hospital. We do not even encourage it.”

MEC Dhlomo said that the sheer nature of the hospital’s large catchment area means that it is difficult to have all of its sections absolutely clean at all times – unlike health facilities in the private healthcare sector, which looks after only 10 percent of the population of KwaZulu-Natal.

“You need to compare apples with apples. Government hospitals, with the high volume of patients, will always have more than what you can take at any given time. All I’m saying is that if you were looking at a private hospital where you can clean toilets in the morning and come back in the afternoon and find that only 15 patients have come into that toilet... Here you have at least 50 patients that would have walked into the hospital per hour because of the high volumes. Yes, we can do better by increasing the pool of people to ensure better hygiene and cleanliness. That is why the Ideal Clinic Realisation Project sets out certain qualities that need to be adhered to. Chief among them is cleanliness. Sometimes it’s not possible to keep the toilets clean all the time due to the high volume of patients.

MEC Dhlomo also dismissed claims that the patient’s wound could have been infected due to the wound being left open so that doctors could inspect it.

“If the complainant was a doctor, I’d say he’s forgotten his knowledge of medicine. Since he is not, he might gain from this education. We have patients that we take to theatre and we cut them open with sterile instruments that have not been made dirty by any source. This patient came in with a laceration from an instrument that he can’t even show us. So, the starting point is that his wound was dirty, to start with. You can never ever say.

“Sometimes the wound is infected by the very skin of the patient. If you were really a normal South African citizen and you don’t mean mischief, you would not be saying the things that he’s saying.”