

"Report complaints with hospital Public Relations Officers" - MEC Dhlomo urges aggrieved healthcare clients and relatives

10 February 2019

KwaZulu-Natal Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo is urging people who may have a grievance after attending a hospital or clinic not to leave the institution without lodging a formal complaint. He says registering a complaint with the hospital Public Relations Officer, office of the CEO or Operations Manager (in the case of clinics) is the only way to ensure remedial action and/or the application of consequence management for wrongdoers, who are in the minority.

The MEC's plea comes after the Department held a workshop for the Public Relations Officers in Durban on Friday. The workshop was part of ongoing efforts to make the PROs more receptive, visible and helpful to the public, in order to improve client experience and satisfaction.

The MEC is concerned that complaints made in the media about a few isolated incidents at hospitals and clinics may erode public confidence in government hospitals and clinics, which serve up to 90% of the population, who are not on medical aid.

He says it is important that clients register any dissatisfaction about the level of service at the site where it happened, because even those who take their complaints to the media – apart from compromising their right to dignity and privacy if the complaint is clinical in nature - will have to go back to the hospital or clinic for their complaint to be investigated. According to Departmental policy, if a complainant is still not satisfied about how their complaint is being dealt with, they may escalate it to the office of the provincial health Ombudsperson, Mr Mboneni Bhekiswayo, based at head office in Pietermaritzburg, which will investigate.



"It was a good decision to recognise and elevate the role of PROs in our hospitals," says the MEC. "Currently, we have over 80 public hospitals in our province and 80 PROs, and about 10 Community HealthCentres (CHCs), with their own PROs. Over the years, we have been conducting workshops, empowering them, and giving them the idea that they are the face of these health facilities... the image of these institutions. We are really delighted with the experience that they have gained over time, and during this past week. We had a meeting with them, inculcating their responsibilities in their hospitals

“Whether people leave smiling or not smiling from the hospitals rests with the PROs. They may not be able to solve everything, but they can actually indicate and assist our clientele by getting the leadership of the hospitals to help them. So, we’d like to appeal to our fellow compatriots to make use of the PROs. Some of them have their phone numbers displayed on the notice board.

“If you have a complaint, and your first port of call is the PRO, we will surely attend to it. Even those complaints that go to the media, they still come back to us to sort out. And therefore, if you start with the PRO, we are saved the negative publicity... because such publicity about a health institution that serves multitudes of our people can easily scare other citizens through something that could have been attended to. We are not saying we are perfect, but everyday we wake up to do our best and solve problems that may arise. So, our appeal to the public is, make use of all our PROs where we have them.”