

Department of 'death'

Thousands of patients in the North West are facing life – threatening conditions which could permanently affect and harm their health. In fact, the patients have now come face - to-face with imminent death because of the ongoing dispute between the North West health department and workers union, national education health and allied workers union (NEHAWU).

The situation has become so serious that members of the portfolio committee on health and social development at the provincial legislature described it as a crisis facing the province which must be resolved as a matter of great urgency.

Hospitals in the province have literally run out of medication including much needed ARVs and patients suffering from all sorts of chronic deceases like kidney failure, heart deceases, cancer and HIV Aids are facing the danger of developing full blown drug resistant situation if the strike continues.

Workers at the local medical depot in Montshioa Township have recently joined the entire health department in its strike action and there has been no delivery of medication or drugs to any health institution which together with clinics in the province has run out of stock because of the disruptions.

Employees at the health department headquarters in Mahikeng have not been going to work while those who attempted to report for duty were threatened with physical harm.

Negotiations between the department and NEHAWU deadlocked again this week and the Magome Masike administration was not sure what mechanisms they needed to embark upon to resolve the dispute with the union.

Acting HOD and chief director corporate services, Vuyo Mbulawa told the committee on Tuesday that the standoff between the department and NEHAWU had negatively affected service deliver and despite several meetings between MEC Masike and union leaders, it was difficult to say when the stalemate would be resolved.

The provision of health services has come to a total standstill as NEHAWU members have blocked services by locking the entire building d all offices using chains and padlocks. Police services, he said, were also not helpful.

In his response to the NEHAWU memorandum of demands, Masike said in the department was dissatisfied with the manner in which NEHAWU's members had conducted themselves regardless of their commitment.

He said the department was committed towards finding amicable solutions within the parameters o the laws of governing public service to issues raised by employees adding that most of the demands tabled by the union work was in progress and cannot be resolved immediately. However, those which are short term will be addressed as within applicable proscribes".

All said and done, we call on all parties to move with speed in resolving this delicate issue as it affects the health and lives of many innocent patients who depend of the medication needed for their recovery. We don't believe that anybody would like to be held responsible for the death or injury of any patient if medication don't reach them on time. Please help us all!

Comment by Bobby Saul of 13 Martin Street, Galleria Arcade, Mafikeng.