

HOSPITAL STAFF 'BURNT-OUT

Workers battle to keep up with 5 000 patients they see monthly

THE shortage of staff and equipment is crippling service delivery to patients at Bernice Samuel Hospital in Delmas, Mpumalanga.

A *Sowetan* investigation found that workers were struggling to keep up with the more than 5 000 patients they see a month. This as a result of the fact that:

- The hospital has 16 doctors instead of the 24 it should have;
- its patients intake has increased from 14 744 in the first quarter of 2011 to 17 500 in the same period this year;
- There is a massive shortage of space, resulting in pregnant women having to give birth on the floor in the two-bed delivery room;
- Nurses are burnt-out, with some already considering resigning;
- Some workers are claiming over-time far exceeding the required 30% of their monthly salary; and
- The casualty ward has been reduced to six beds as the extra emergency room is seldom used due to a leaking ceiling.

This, while the Mpumalanga health department has informed hospital CEOs about its intention to suspend the use of locum doctors, who are hired to assist struggling hospitals, due to the abuse of the overtime system.

Meanwhile, the province has an 81% vacancy rate for doctors and 66% for professional nurses.

Mpumalanga has 33 hospitals on



DIRE STRAITS: Heavily pregnant women lie on stretchers in the corridors, top. A new mother cuddles her baby in the maternity ward. Women who have given birth naturally are mixed with those who have given birth through Caesarian section because of space Shortages. PHOTO: VATHISWA RUSELO

Department wants to fill doctor vacancies

ALTHOUGH the Mpumalanga health department failed to reply to our specific queries regarding the state of Bernice Samuel Hospital, the department said it wanted to reduce the current doctors' vacancy rate from 81% to 60%.

Spokesman Dumisani Mlangeni said: "During our policy and budget debate the MEC [Dr Clifford Mkasi] outlined all staffing challenges and made a commitment that we will make every effort to reduce the vacancy rate to 60%. Considerable progress has been made so far."

He failed to give details of the progress they claim to have made but said the suspension of locum doctors was because of costs.

"The head of department issued a memo to ensure that we rationalise the way we operate with these agencies as we were given exorbitant figures for their services. Our idea is to negotiate better and reasonable costs with them," said Mlangeni, who could not answer questions about infrastructure, overtime abuse and equipment shortages.

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which 88% of its 3.6-million population mainly relies.

The hospital has no porters and this task is being handled by security guards.

Earlier this year, the health department withdrew the six HIV counsellors at the hospital due to a contractual disagreement with the service provider, a reliable source at the hospital said. Now nurses act as counsellors.

Due to shortages, its R26-million theatre only operates during week-days for minor procedures. Another source said the hospital had one clerk who facilitates admissions but due to the overburden some patient files go missing.

"This poor person has to assist 5 000 patients a month and open 54 scripts a day. Sometimes there is no time to look for existing patient files and he is forced to open a new one quickly," the source said.

"At the end of the day, we end up



losing critical information that could help the doctor to make a quick diagnosis."

Due to shortages, some nurses claim for up to 300 hours of overtime a month (instead of the recommended 30 hours) pocketing over R20 000 extra. This month alone the hospital paid R300 000 for overtime.

A board member at the hospital said it was unfair that the department had not been replacing retired staff.

"The department tells us it does not have money to replace them but they are willing to pay for overtime."

The hospital's maternity ward is the worst affected as it currently runs

with two staff members who deliver between 30 and 50 babies a day..

Their duties include monitoring the baby nursery and care for new and expecting mothers. They deal with space shortages;

which often results in pregnant women needing to sleep in the corridors, as *Sowetan* witnessed during the visit.

"Working in this chaos makes me want to cry and I can't wait until I leave this place," said a nurse, showing her swollen feet from working around the clock.

"We are forced to mix C-section mothers with those that had just given natural birth or are due to deliver. It is scary for someone who is due to give birth for the first time to see such things."

Hospital CEO Sethunya Kgafela referred *Sowetan* to the province's health department with its queries.

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