

## **MENTAL HEALTH UNDER PRESSURE ALSO DUE TO LACK OF PSYCHIATRISTS IN SA**

There is only 1 psychiatrist per 100,000 of the South African population, and in the state sector with the greatest demand, there are even less according to the WHO Global Health Observatory data of 2015.

To train more psychiatrists than the average number of 35 who currently qualify annually in order to achieve a modestly improved ratio of 1.5/100,000, the current training capacity and number of available registrar training posts at the eight medical schools country-wide, may have to be increased drastically said the South African Society of Psychiatrists' (SASOP) President, Prof Bernard Janse van Rensburg.

Prof Janse van Rensburg commented on the Gauteng Department of Health's high-level intervention team appointed to start work today who has to coordinate a recovery plan for the Department. He said that although they welcome the initiative, the Department should also not lose sight of the inadequate number of psychiatrists nationwide and the issues arising as a result on provincial level across the country.

He said that the lack of psychiatrists and professional support staff is placing an enormous pressure on the mental health care system. In Gauteng, the training capacity, including the number of registrar training and academic consultant posts at the three Departments of Psychiatry in the province, should be included in the strategic considerations of the Gauteng Department of Health's intervention team.

“The increasing incidence of problems and growing population and mental health care users, severe and unsupported working conditions, lack of funding for proper research and care for patients are some of the reasons cited by professionals either leaving the country or moving to private practice.”

“Budgets are severely constrained. Mental health has always fallen at the bottom of budget allocations and in order to achieve success in not only improving the conditions for patients but also the increase in staff cadres, the mental health sector needs to receive a significant increase in funding.”

He commented that SASOP's regional Subgroup statement in June 2017 exposing the dire state of affairs in each province across the country was heavily criticised by the National Minister, both for the accuracy of the information it referred to, as well as for the fact that a professional body such as SASOP has communicated this information publicly.

"Our findings released at the time were, however, confirmed to be accurate not only by the reasons stated this week for the appointment of the Gauteng recovery team, but also during meetings with the national Ministerial Advisory Committee in August 2017 and with the MEC's and Departments of Health of Mpumalanga and Eastern Cape. Similar information was released by all the different provincial departments of health who, during its recent national hearing held on the status of mental health in South Africa, made submissions and presentations to the South African Human Rights Commission earlier in November 2017. Our statistics concurred not only with the provinces' own assessments, but also with the report on the audit of provincial mental health services, conducted by the National Department of Health itself."

Prof Janse van Rensburg said they support the development of new business models for delivering integrated care by available public and private practitioners in innovative public-private partnership projects where uniform baskets of care have been determined, in the context of realistic and fair remuneration of services rendered on different levels of care.

"We therefore also strongly support and have participated in the Gauteng MEC of Health, Dr Gwen Ramakgopa's initiatives at the Gauteng Mental Health Summit held on the 31<sup>st</sup> October 2017 to further develop the narrative on mental health care in Gauteng following the Life Esidimeni disaster, also through improved governance, operational research and strategic management principles.

"A new declaration was adopted in Midrand in October and a renewed pledge was undertaken at this occasion to prioritise mental health care, to put it firmly onto the health agenda, to eradicate the stigma still associated with mental health illness and

care, to recognise that mental health is the cornerstone of people's health and also, importantly, to break the silence about mental health issues and about issues in the mental health care delivery system."

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