

Attack on doctor sparks security concerns

The South African Medical Association (Sama), and its Eastern Cape branch, has condemned the lack of proper security at public hospitals in the province after a doctor was assaulted by a patient.



Cecilia Makiwane Hospital. Picture: *Daily Dispatch*

Dr Archie Solombela sustained a fracture to his right arm and a general worker was also hurt during the attack by a psychiatric patient at the Cecilia Makiwane Hospital in East London. According to a [report](#) in the *Daily Dispatch*, suspected mentally ill patients are being admitted to general wards for observation, and because resources are so thinly stretched at government hospitals in the province this takes much longer than the standard 72 hours.

This is an unacceptable situation which requires urgent attention,” Sama said in a statement. “Of concern now is why no precautionary measures were put in place, considering the patient has a known violent history. This indicates either a lack of proper planning and coordination, or a lack of will to ensure the safety of healthcare professionals in the province.”

Drug abuse to blame

This is not the first incident involving psychiatric patients at the hospital. In June, a fight broke out among 24 mentally ill patients, which left six of them injured. In addition, a ward was damaged, prompting doctors to close it down. Police and security guards had to be called to calm the fighting patients.

In another incident, guard died of head injuries when he was attacked by a psychiatric patient at Nompumelelo Hospital in Peddie last year.

The Eastern Cape Department of Health blames a sharp rise in drug abuse in the province for the influx of mentally ill patient, particularly teenagers and young men, with which it is battling to cope.

As a first step in dealing with this problem, Sama met the management of the hospital with a view to resolving issues going forward. “During this meeting we stressed that a violent patient is a danger, not only to healthcare workers, but also other patients, and that patient safety is one of the six priorities of healthcare in South Africa. As an association, we are convinced the incident could have been avoided, and we urge authorities to do everything they can to protect our members and our patients in hospitals.”

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