

Sama KZN to protest the sorry state of healthcare in the province

To highlight the poor state of public healthcare in the province, the South African Medical Association's (Sama) KwaZulu-Natal coastal branch has resolved to embark on protest march on Friday, 5 May. The branch has called on all doctors and specialists, as well as all allied health and labour organisations in the province, to support this action.



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“Through this awareness, we hope to gain support from the public as we demand an end to the rapidly deteriorating delivery of healthcare services in our province. This situation is getting worse every day, and as healthcare professionals we are duty bound to do something about it. This situation cannot continue without meaningful intervention,” says Dr Mvuyisi Mzukwa, Sama KZN coastal branch chairperson.

Unilateral changes

According to him, the branch is alarmed by the provincial health department’s decision to unilaterally change the conditions of employment of all doctors by freezing critical posts, creating unfunded posts, keeping some doctors unemployed, and introducing a new commuted overtime policy without adequate consultation.

Subsequent to the introduction of the new policy, the doctors held a number of meetings with health officials demanding changes. A consultative process began with the national department of health, but the provincial health department undermined the process by commencing workshops to enforce the unilateral implementation of the new policy.

According to Mzukwa, the branch has noticed a sharp deterioration in healthcare at hospitals and clinics in the province over the years. Indications of this include shortages of medicines, collapsing infrastructure, broken equipment, and inadequate provision of staff. This has led to a situation where access to healthcare services, and patient dignity is compromised daily.

Total collapse

“Recently, to further exacerbate the situation, the national department rejected a call by the medical profession to increase doctor posts. This undermines the advocacy role, and ethical responsibilities, of our doctors who need to protect the interests of the poor communities, who rely heavily on public healthcare facilities,” says Mzukwa.

There was a total collapse in the departments of oncology, ENT, urology, and, lately, anaesthetics. He said members of Sama are reporting a variety of problems on a daily basis including burnout, mass resignations, and the relocation of doctors to other provinces.

“As a result of the problems not being addressed adequately by the provincial department of health, we have taken the very serious step of deciding to embark on this protest march,” concludes Mzukwa.

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