

South Africa's healthcare crisis calls for collaboration

The solution to the significant challenges facing the South African healthcare sector lies in better collaboration between the different parties.



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The current state of affairs has only worsened over the past few years. Key players within the industry have been playing the blame game in the face of escalating healthcare challenges, says the South African Society of Anaesthesiologists (SASA).

An industry at odds with itself

Last month, the Council for Medical Schemes (CMS) and the South African Medical Association (SAMA) appeared before the Competition Tribunal to argue alleged price-fixing by specialists. CMS called into question SAMA's methods regarding the published regulations on how specialist doctors bill patients.

This follows recent media comments by Dr Kgosi Letlape, president of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), calling for the abolishment of medical schemes and saying that they were a "crime against humanity".

Then there has been the ongoing debate between doctors and the Department of Health about the availability of posts for doctors and pharmacists in the public service healthcare sector versus the willingness of medical professionals to take up the posts that exist.

Little in the way of solutions

With the vast number of stories on the topic of healthcare in South Africa, too few have been purely solution-driven.

SASA believes that there are two reasons for this. Firstly, the solution is not easy to identify. Many countries, including the UK and the US (with vastly different healthcare models) are facing the same concerns with little in the way of effective solutions. Secondly, the South African healthcare sector is extremely fragmented with different role players being more adversarial than collaborative.

The only possible way a solution can be found is by putting past battles and current vested interests aside and working together. If there is to be any hope for the future of healthcare in South Africa, it's time we stop blaming each other and instead start working towards definitive solutions to pull us out of the situation we find ourselves in, the statement says.

The current debate around improving healthcare has been largely polarised, with each option being vilified in support of another. This includes funding models in the private sector, the implementation of a universal health model and the roll-out of National Health Insurance (NHI) and even public/private partnerships.

In reality, the organisation argues, a successful model, or as close as we can get, can only be borne out of the best of all possibilities.

"We need to sit together and, without defensiveness, accept the good and the bad in all and, together, design a future for the country," says SASA CEO, Natalie Zimmerman.

"Collaboration, effectiveness and transformation between government, medical schemes, healthcare organisations and healthcare practitioners is what is required to take South Africa's healthcare system forward."

SASA has already implemented collaborative models with colleagues, government and other stakeholders, including a partnership with the Limpopo Department of Health that has already reduced maternal mortality rates.

"We have seen other sectors, such as the accounting profession, where all role players have come together to address their constraints. The [Thuthuka](#) model has been effectively used to transform the profession. We can and must do the same in the healthcare sector," says Zimmerman.

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