

Whatever happened to the doctors & nurses involved in the #LifeEsidimeni tragedy

By [Nelisiwe Msomi](#)

27 May 2019

The former Gauteng health department head who presided over the [Life Esidimeni](#) tragedy, Barney Selebano, will face the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) in September in an inquiry that may eventually cost him his medical license.



Former head of the Gauteng department of health Barney Selebano (pictured) may lose his license to practise medicine after an inquiry into his involvement in the Life Esidimeni deaths in September. (Joyrene Kramer, Section27)

Selebano was one of three high ranking officials singled out in a health ombudsman's report into the Life Esidimeni tragedy, which saw almost 2 000 mental health patients removed from state-funded private care facilities and moved to ill-equipped community NGOs. At least 144 people eventually died as a result of the move. In the aftermath of the [ombud's report](#), 134 patient families agreed to take part in a historic arbitration to allow the Gauteng health department to avoid litigation and to promote healing.

Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke, who presided over the arbitration, [ordered the Gauteng health department to report Selebano to the HPCSA for his part in signing off on the deadly move](#).

Moseneke also instructed the health department to report three nurses involved in the scandal to their regulatory body, the South African Nursing Council (SANC): Former director of mental health services, Makgoba Manamela and her deputy, Hannah Jacobus as well as the former head of Gauteng's Mental Health Review Board, Dumi Masondo. These provincial boards are supposed to act as oversight bodies, as well as working to ensure doctors were present in all clinics and community health centres.

Both the HPCSA and the SANC hold power to revoke health workers' ability to practice if they are found guilty of misconduct.

In March, the HPCSA informed Bhekisisa that Selebano's charge sheet has been finalised and that he had been informed of the charges against him. The HPCSA declined to comment on the specific charges levelled at Selebano but initially said a disciplinary committee would hear his case in June. The body confirmed to Bhekisisa that Selebano's case has now been postponed to September.

Selebano is still registered with the HPCSA and can practice medicine.

Gauteng health's spokesperson Lesemang Matuka told Bhekisisa in August that the department had reported Manamela, Jacobus and Masondo to SANC. While SANC declined to confirm the names of those reported to it, CEO Sizo Mchunu says investigations are ongoing but admitted there have been delays in acquiring supporting documents.

"The SANC Council Committee responsible for this has also made it a major priority and is putting pressure on the various sources to have this information as soon as possible in order to proceed with the investigation", Mchunu says.

"While we are busy with the investigation, we cannot divulge any information pertinent to the investigation, including the parties and sources involved. As soon as the investigation has been finalised, and we have a conclusion we will, however, revert with a report as we believe it is the public's right to know what has transpired."

The National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) is also still probing 45 criminal cases related to the Life Esidimeni tragedy, according to spokesperson Phindi Mjonondwane.

Last year, the NPA told Bhekisisa that this process would be concluded by August 2018.

Life Esidimeni family committee member Christine Nxumalo, whose sister Virginia Macphela died in the move, says families met with the NPA in April.

"The NPA was not able to give us specific information, but according to them, they are still investigating and finalising their work. [They said that] the amount of work — and with the team being slightly smaller — and the intensity and detail of investigations [are delaying the process]," Nxumalo explains.

Earlier this year, the Gauteng government said they received 365 additional claims that were not part of the arbitration. These claims will have to be reviewed and validated by the High Court before they can receive any compensation from the Gauteng government.

In her budget speech, outgoing MEC of finance and current ANC MP Barbra Creecy set aside R300-million to compensate the families behind the latest set of claims stemming from the tragedy. Families who claimed via the arbitration were paid out in full in June.

Nxumalo says that families hope that the NPA can conclude investigations soon.

She says: "But unfortunately, it is not up to us."

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