Publication: DIAMOND FIELDS ADVERTISER
Title: Health claims triple
AVE: 6581.52
Page: 3
Publish Date: 21 November 2017
Author: Staff Reporter

PROTEST: Residents of John Daka blocked off the road at the intersection of John Daka and Phillip Mpiwa streets, demanding that their ward councillor steps down.

Picture: **Soraya Crowie**

Health claims triple

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STAFF REPORTER

WHILE serious concern has been raised about legal claims against the Northern Cape Department of Health, tripling to close to R1.5 billion, allegations have also emerged that dialysis patients have been turned away for the last three weeks due to a lack of essential stock.

The Democratic Alliance yesterday said that it would request "urgent intervention" from the Minister of Health, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, amidst increasing concerns about sub-standard health care provision to the people of the Province, which the party believed was being mirrored by growing legal claims against the Northern Cape Health Department.

The Department of Health yesterday ignored all attempts by the DFA to obtain its side of the story and failed to comment.

"During last week's portfolio committee meeting with the Department of Health, rising legal claims came under the spotlight. Legal claims against the department have tripled in the past financial year from just under R500 million to close on R1,5 billion at the start of 2017/2018," DA spokesperson, Isak Fritz, said.

"Medical negligence claims account for the biggest portion of the claims facing the department, and currently stands at R1,2 billion. This is deeply concerning as it means that, if all the claims are successful, the department will owe more than a quarter of its annual budget to patients on whom it has inflicted injuries instead of having cured," Fritz said.

He added that it was unlikely that errant doctors and nurses alone were responsible for these mounting medical negligence claims.

Increase

"Instead, this sharp and sudden increase is a symptom of a much broader and more serious problem. Growing medico-legal claims speak to a number of issues such as the lack of staff, overworked staff, improperly qualified staff, shortage of pharmaceuticals, the absence of critical equipment, deficient medical supplies, not enough operational ambulances, issues pertaining to hygiene, failure to secure patient records, poor patient safety and so on.

"In fact, the Kimberley Hospital has just recently been out of stock of tubing for dialysis procedures, which resulted in no patients receiving dialysis treatment for approximately three weeks.

"This, like so many other failures of this department, is detrimental to patients' lives and places additional strain on the already overburdened health care system. It could also very likely result in additional claims against the department," he added.

He went on to say that the department's deteriorating financial state, which has resulted in a number of service providers and suppliers not being paid, and further exposing it to possible legal action, has become "a hazard to both the department and patients".

"It cannot be tolerated that people must risk acquiring disabilities and even risk losing their lives because of the incompetent management of the Department of Health. The fact that the fight to receive adequate health care has relocated from clinics and hospitals to the courts, is a sure sign that the department has completely lost control of its mandate.

"The DA will write to the Minister of Health calling for an urgent intervention to address the inherent financial mismanagement within the department," Fritz said.

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