



general salary increases of the past three years'. Any other form of rectification could be 'harsh and have serious labour implications'.

SAMA's industrial relations advisor, Thembi Gumbi, said it seemed that 'most of our KZN doctors are affected'.

She said that the Public Service Act favoured Fraser-Moleketi's move in overturning Mkhize's blanket increases, but said this would need to be tested against the Constitution.

Gumbi suggested negotiating upwards the original protocol of notch-promoting 20% of the staff establishment at each public service institution as 'a more fruitful strategy' than challenging Fraser-Moleketi legally.

However Hospersa's Moultrie strongly disagreed, saying this would lead to further discrimination among workers.

KZN Auditor-General, Barry Wheeler, has been instructed by Pretoria to probe the procedures followed by Mkhize in making the 2001 backdated increases.

He said Fraser-Moleketi was fully entitled to rescind the payments as her department had the responsibility of ensuring nationwide consistency within the public service and applying the regulations governing salaries.

SAMA's KZN Coastal Branch president, Dr Mzukisi Grootboom, said the original strikes were a direct response to 'the lack of clear criteria' in Fraser-Moleketi's first directive that 20% of staff got increases after assessment.

'The whole thing was implemented unfairly and Mkhize's response, while perhaps not strictly legal, was correct and pragmatic because it calmed things down and avoided further disruption'.

Grootboom said that to reverse Mkhize's intervention now would cause 'tremendous hardship and disruption. We must all sit down and negotiate the situation - we fully support Mkhize'.

He suggested retaining the status quo and negotiating a lower level of annual increases in KZN in future until salary scales were on a par with the rest of the country.

On 21 January, Nehawu, Denosa and Hospersa met with Mkhize and agreed to help him chart a course through what Moultrie described as 'this



Mzukisi Grootboom

administrative nightmare'. He added that 'he thought we were against him but we also support his decision.'

Mkhize and Fraser-Moleketi were due to meet eight days later to negotiate a settlement almost certain to leave some of the nation's health workers with less take home pay than others on the same salary notch. Moultrie said the unions would await that outcome before deciding on a course of action.

Chris Bateman

The South African Medical Journal

50 years ago: Mutata poisoning per vagina

On 9 April 1952 a Lovale woman was brought to hospital by relatives because she had poisoned herself by inserting roots of the mutata tree into her vagina. Although badly shocked, she was able to tell the following story: a man offered her three shillings to live with him. This she had done for some time, but now felt that he might as well marry her. When she asked him, he became very annoyed, told her that he would leave and demanded his three shillings back. She felt so depressed that she wanted to die and inserted some powdered roots of mutata into her vagina. The relatives, on hearing this, cleared out her vagina and rushed her to hospital.



Medical Officers stationed at Balovale have in their annual reports, repeatedly mentioned this form of suicide, e.g. in 1943 Dr JWO Will reported eight deaths from this cause in the Balovale district. Amongst them were two young girls who had the root introduced into the vagina by an African doctor in an effort to procure abortion. From local information available it appears that the mutata (*securidaca longipedunculata*) tree is very common in the Balovale and Mwinilunga districts and that its poisonous properties are well known to the populace. Suicide by mutata however seems to be confined to the Lovale people. Even in Barotseland, where cases also occur, it is restricted to tribes of Lovale origin. Informants are emphatic that the root scrapings are only poisonous when introduced into the vagina or rectum and that they are harmless by mouth. They are, in fact, taken as an infusion for coughs and various other ills.

W Gilges, Balovale, Northern Rhodesia

(SAMJ March 1953, Pg 28)

