

ANC COMES OUT SWINGING ON CON

The government seems determined to enact the Certificate of Need (CON) law and has accused protesting doctors of being more worried about their pockets than equity in health care.

In a hard-hitting article on the ANC's website, the ruling party highlights the money-grabbing, inflationary and perverse nature of the private health care market.



Acting Director-General of health, Dr Kamy Chetty, accepted a memorandum at the 6 February protest march.

It said that leaving the transformation of private health care to market forces alone had so far been an unmitigated failure.

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The article is a direct response to the historic protest march on Parliament by 2 000 doctors on 6 February this year.

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The most vitriolic ANC comments are reserved for outspoken SAMA chairperson, Dr Kgosi Letlape. He is

accused of leading the medical profession into the political terrain while having been 'a spectator during the fight to liberate this country'.

The article expresses 'serious concern' that 'the rest of the medical profession' has not publicly contradicted his statement that health services were 'much better' during apartheid days than was the case under the present dispensation (*Business Report*, 12 February).

Addressing a symposium in Johannesburg, Letlape was quoted in *Business Day* as saying he 'grew up at a time when we had a more decent health care system than we have at present'.

Calling for more funding to prevent the gradual collapse of the health care system, Letlape appealed for a return to 'that era where funding for the health care system was the norm'.

He has also told the *SAMJ* that the CON was 'another form of the Group Areas Act where influx control was practised,' adding 'we're back to the good old days'.

The ANC accuses 'some' doctors of 'maliciously spreading the notion that there is a plot to wipe out private medicine'.

It claims that the 'media frenzy' generated by doctors around the CON had obscured the real intent of the law.

'What comes out clearly is that some doctors want to preserve privilege and they want it entrenched in national legislation,' the party says.

While the majority of doctors stuck to the rules of good medical practice, 'a significant minority' was lining its pockets at the expense of other stakeholders and even government.

The article cited the Illes radiologists kickbacks case and the development of 'anti-fraud' units by medical aids among examples justifying the regulation of private health care.

It said the CON would not only control the distribution of health care services but also match the type of health care services to the needs of a particular area.

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'There is always a tendency to spend money on expensive medical technology that is "nice to have" rather than critical for the health of the population', it said.

The new law had to be seen in the context of contributing to a sustainable health system.

The 'questionable' constitutional right of doctors to practise wherever they wished had to be balanced with the constitutional right of access to health care for patients and the constitutional obligation of the state to ensure that access.

The limited resources available needed to be made accessible to the greatest number of people.

Besides its enormous potential as a health-planning tool, the CON had several 'extremely useful' spin-offs.



Dr Percy Mahlati, former CEO of SAMA in his challenging new role as Special Advisor to the Director-General of Health.

These included using it to set up referral systems for essential services, identifying localised disease profiles and offering a rational basis for identifying scarce skills and the appropriate incentives to retain them.

It could be used to manage the interface between the public and private health sectors for partnerships and mutual benefit arrangements.

It could also help prevent practitioners who had been struck off the Health Professions register from practising illegally.

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Letlape said the website article was littered with 'misinformation and a lot of stuff that is of a personal nature' and demanded to know who its author was.

ANC head office spokesperson, Khulekani Ntshangase, said the article represented 'an organisational position'.

Letlape said he would take up what he regarded as a personal attack with the Secretary General of the ANC.

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Chris Bateman

MPUMALANGA HEALTH DEPARTMENT UNRAVELLING BEGINS...

Mpumalanga's former health chief, Reina Charles, took the dock beside her brother-in-law, Nelspruit business tycoon Percy Sibozza, on 1 March this year to face tender fraud charges involving tens of millions of rands after a lengthy Scorpions probe.



'Favoured' Nelspruit businessman, Mr Percy Sibozza.

She was arrested on 24 February, just under a month after Sibozza, the chairman of the local National Africa Federated Chamber of Commerce (NAFCOC), was confronted by Scorpions investigators outside his plush Nelspruit business premises.

The pair are alleged to be involved in a R50 million web of nepotism and corruption woven by key current and

former employees of the Mpumalanga Health Department and their Nelspruit business associates, relatives and lovers.

Sibozza first appeared alone in the Pretoria Magistrate's Court in late January when he was granted R40 000 bail. His bail was extended at his second appearance on 1 March, at which Charles was granted R30 000 bail. Both were warned to appear again on 17 May.

While evidence has yet to be heard against the pair, several forensic audits of the Health Department's finances and the Scorpions themselves have indicated that more arrests are likely.

At the time of Sibozza's arrest (26 January), Scorpions spokesman, Makhosini Nkosi, told the SAMJ that 'three or four' further arrests were due 'within days', prompting speculation that these would include prominent senior government and political figures.

By 6 March only Charles had been arrested, although Nkosi still insisted more would follow.

The forensic reports indicate that Charles routinely tampered with tenders to the benefit of companies linked to Sibozza.

Sibozza himself is in business partnership with at least two people who have intimate historical and personal links with the Mpumalanga Health Department. One is Mr Tiny Jordaan, a lawyer and the former acting head of the Mpumalanga Health Department.

Forensic reports claim Jordaan helped his girlfriend, the Health Department's current project co-ordinator Ms Rijki Arrenbrecht, choose R13.7 million worth of medical equipment from a catalogue after hours. The reports say Arrenbrecht was ordered to purchase the medical equipment by Reina Charles.

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Puzzled hospital administrators across the province were confronted with equipment they had not ordered while being forced to go without many essential items they had ordered.