



Mtshali (of Helen Joseph Hospital, Gauteng), Provincial Co-ordinator Dr Nicola Buchan (Bloemfontein Hospital, Free State), Student Liaison Officer Dr Katlego Mpepele (Prince Mshiyeni Hospital, KZN), and Internship and Comserve Co-ordinator Dr Kgomotso Mogapi, George Stegman Hospital,

North West). Except for Dombi, all are first-time office bearers. The chairperson, Gibbs, who is based at Manguzi Hospital in KZN, said he would focus on strengthening Judasa's provincial structures and communications between these and hospital intern representatives.

He appealed to members to 'initiate conversations' with their hospital managements and to use SAMA's highly professional industrial relations unit if problems arose.

Chris Bateman

E CAPE SWINE FEVER UPS KWAZULU-NATAL HUMAN RABIES RISK

Canine rabies cases in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) have more than doubled over the last 16 months as veterinary services staff are redeployed to the Eastern Cape border to protect the province against swine fever.

KZN's anti-rabies dog vaccination campaign is less a third of its staff who are still deployed around the clock to 9 swine fever decontamination road blocks in the south of the province.

While the swine fever defence seems to be working, canine rabies figures have since more than doubled, from 141 cases in 2005 to 308 by the end of last year, increasing the risk of human rabies, with 4 people dying of rabies after dog bites last year. Three people died of rabies in the province in each of the previous years.

More alarmingly, according to Kevin le Roux, KZN's rabies project manager, another 6 people, mostly children, were last year fatally savaged by packs of feral dogs scrounging rural and peri-urban homes and their environs for food. The packs were also killing chicken, goats, cattle and even domestic dogs that tried to protect their territory and/or food bowls.

'We're working really hard to try and reintroduce mass vaccination – we've imported oral bait vaccine, and do

sterilisation, removal of unwanted and stray dogs (spaying and culling). But without staff, we're not reaching the animals and there's a corresponding rise in rabies,' Le Roux said.

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Strong HIV/rabies link

He and his Department of Health counterpart at the local communicable disease control unit, Dr Uma Nagpal, re-asserted their belief that HIV/AIDS was behind an explosion of feral dogs in the province. Said Le Roux: 'You get entire families wiped out by HIV/AIDS and dogs abandoned. Then you also have the situation where breadwinners are ill or dying, which changes the whole emphasis of family life and their priorities. A dog doesn't even feature then'.

HIV/AIDS prevalence in KZN stands at 36%. Le Roux cited a call-out to Sweetwaters township,

Pietermaritzburg, just hours before *Izindaba* called him in mid-March. 'We've just removed 45 uncontrolled dogs that the community managed to help us catch. We'd never had a problem there before.'

Le Roux said reports of problem animals and dog packs come in daily: 'I believe the HIV/AIDS link is very strong, but just as important is poverty and the lack of basic health interventions with dogs, like spaying and sterilisation. Dogs are breeding uncontrolled, aggravating the situation'.

A typical situation would be *Gokos* (grandmothers) looking after a household with a few children and two female dogs. 'The next day they wake up and there are 20 dogs – what happens to those animals?'

With department of health and local authority co-operation, he had managed, by supplementing ordinary vaccination with the new oral bait vaccination (for stray and problem animals), to reach an extra 10% of dogs in some communities.

Special baiting permission granted

He had also received permission from some municipalities and districts to distribute oral bait vaccine to animals



whose owners were absent. 'The rabies project is trying to institute a mass vaccination campaign to halt this increase. I get staff help from vet services and community health, but we simply have to put up a fire break now to slow the whole thing down before I can get stuck into any proper quantitative research.'

He said he dealt with 'literally hundreds' of reports of stray and feral dogs monthly, 'and we have no means to control them'.

A province-wide canine census was currently under way and should be completed before the end of the year. This would enable him to quantify what

percentage of the population they were reaching with the various rabies and population control measures.

Dr Nagpal agreed that the dog population was 'definitely neglected', adding that she was 'certain of the HIV link – even common sense tells us that'. Dr Bruce Margot, the TB chief for KZN, who has extensive experience in local community health, said HIV was 'certainly a factor that contributes. We urgently need the resources for a comprehensive canine vaccination programme'.

Other provinces relatively safe

Unlike other provinces where wild,

mainly nocturnal animals carried rabies (with the exception of Limpopo where rabies recently re-entered the dog population), rabies is carried mainly by dogs in KZN, making it a significant human threat.

Le Roux, who was leading a house-to-house vaccination, sterilisation and training campaign in Inchanga in the KZN midlands at the time of writing, plans to return to his research on the rabies/HIV link, 'the moment we have a good vaccination programme in place'. That hard scientific evidence may be some time in coming...

Chris Bateman

DENOSA 'BARKING UP THE WRONG TREE' – WORRALL-CLARE



The caring attitude fostered among nurses during training can prove difficult to maintain under pressure.

Contrary to nursing union claims of 'selfish profiteering', the private hospital industry was 'champing at the bit' to help meet the country's nursing shortage, says Advocate Kurt Worrall-Clare, CEO of the Hospital Association of South Africa (HASA).

Private hospitals, which were already spending over R100 million on training, were 'hamstrung' by legal bottlenecks that prevented them from training

registered professional nurses, a 4-year moratorium on the accreditation of academic facilities and wildly fluctuating annual spending by the health and welfare sector education and training authority (SETA), he added.

The Denosa pair charged that private hospital groups were 'tapping off the cream' of publicly trained health care professionals while failing to contribute enough to the training and development of nurses and posting record profits year after year.

Worrall-Clare was responding to charges against his member hospitals by Denosa national organiser Itumeleng Molatlhegi and its general secretary Thembeke Gwagwa.

The Denosa pair charged that private hospital groups were 'tapping off the cream' of publicly trained health care

professionals while failing to contribute enough to the training and development of nurses and posting record profits year after year.

Gwagwa, while firing off a concurrent broadside at government for its tardiness in acknowledging the nursing shortage crisis and in its inaction in luring them back from overseas, told *Izindaba* that more internationally competitive salaries would help.

She said private hospital groups could 'contribute in many ways', including offering nursing bursaries and letting students use their own facilities to train in. 'I'm aware that Netcare, for example, is training enrolled nurses and enrolled nursing assistants, but why not professional nurses?' she asked.

Gwagwa said the private health care sector was 'huge' and used up 'an unfair proportion' of the country's human resources while servicing a minority of the population. 'They need to make a contribution towards training,' she asserted.