

Minister orders an end to wards for the rich

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Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi has instructed the Gauteng health department to open its controversial private wards at four state hospitals to all members of the public.



Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi has abolished private wards in public hospital. Image: GQIS

More than 226 beds at Charlotte Maxeke, Helen Joseph, Sebokeng and Pretoria West hospitals had been reserved exclusively for medical aid patients and those who could afford to pay.

The so-called Fofateng (place of healing) private wards, established between 2002 and 2005, came under fire this week from Professor Ken Huddle, Head of Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital's department of medicine, and 16 of his colleagues, who demanded their closure.

Motsoaledi said: "You can't provide private medical care inside a public institution. We are working round the clock to make sure we abolish that.

"It's wrong because you are dividing people into the rich and poor within a public facility. You are saying: 'You are rich, go this way; you are poor, go that way,'" he said.

Private wards a waste of time

Gauteng Health Spokesman Simon Zwane said the wards give the patient the quality and convenience of private healthcare with specialist physicians and cutting-edge technology.

But a doctor working at Helen Joseph said that the Folateng wards were a "waste of time".

"Patients in those wards were not getting much more. It's the same food. The only difference is you get a TV and the bathrooms are cleaner," the doctor said.

Motsoaledi said he had instructed his Director-General, Matsoso Malebona, to inform Gauteng's health department that it's actually illegal to tell somebody they can't use a bed in a public hospital because it's reserved for somebody with a medical aid.

A report by Gauteng's health portfolio committee last year found that the Folateng wards at Charlotte Maxeke had cost R72m for the 2012/13 financial year - and generated only R42m.

The wards have not been popular with major medical aid schemes. Polmed - a medical aid scheme for members of the South African Police Service - said only 30 members used the wards last year.

Bobby Ramasia, Principal Executive Officer of Bonitas, said: "Most members are uncomfortable when having to make use of public sector hospitals."

Source: Sunday Times via I-Net Bridge

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