

SA faces uphill battle to retain doctors, nurses

Remuneration in foreign countries, that the government cannot match, is frustrating efforts to retain doctors and nurses in SA, Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi said.



Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi says government is powerless to prevent doctors and nurses leaving the country. Image: GCIS

Updating members of Parliament's health portfolio committee on progress with the National Health Insurance (NHI) pilot projects, Motsoaledi said the department was doing all it could to stop doctors and nurses from leaving SA. But it was struggling as countries such as the US and the United Arab Emirates offered "greener pastures" for local medical professionals.

Dr Motsoaledi warned that the roll-out of the NHI would not succeed if the shortage of doctors was not addressed. The department was struggling to contract general practitioners for the NHI pilot projects. "It is working, but we are struggling," Dr Motsoaledi said.

"Many of them say the conditions in this clinic are not good. They say, 'Improve the clinic first, then I will come in.' Once you go to them and say the clinic has improved, they say, 'No the salary needs improving a little bit.' We are dealing with that at the moment," he said.

Worldwide shortage

SA has one of the lowest doctor-to-patient ratios in the world, and the country's medical schools are producing just more than 1,000 doctors a year, which is not enough.

The shortage of doctors and nurses was a "global phenomenon", Motsoaledi said. "People believe that it is only here in SA (and) are pointing fingers asking why do nurses and doctors not stay in our country.

"Doctors, nurses and skilled people all around the world move to greener pastures where there are paid better. If you meet the Canadians, they will tell you how many doctors they are losing to the US. Canadians say 'if it was not for you guys in SA then we would be finished because all of our doctors go to the US'. Our doctors will then move to replace those in Canada, or move to Australia or England."

Motsoaledi said the World Health Organisation had classified sub-Saharan Africa as a crisis region in terms of staffing of health workers. In 2011 at the World Health Assembly, there was a resolution passed to the effect that no advanced country should actively recruit medical practitioner from a developing region.

But an International Labour Organisation resolution says any worker has the right to sell his/her skills anywhere in the world.

Source: Business Day via I-Net Bridge

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