

## SA-Cuba agreement to boost healthcare

Cabinet has noted the signing of an agreement between the South African and Cuban Ministries of Health.

Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi and his Cuban counterpart Roberto Morales Ojeda signed the collaboration agreement in Pretoria last week.

"This agreement will enable South Africa to use the capacity that Cuba has in the training of medical doctors. Through this new agreement, we will now be able to increase the number of students who will be deployed to Cuba for medical training," said Minister in the Presidency for Performance Monitoring and Evaluation, Collins Chabane, on Friday.

The agreement is expected to strengthen the South African Health Ministry's strategic interventions in implementing the National Health Insurance (NHI) and overhauling the healthcare system by refocusing on primary healthcare and improving the functionality and management.

The agreement will also assist in improving human resources, planning, development and management and strengthening research and development, with a focus in biotechnology exchange and innovation.

The two countries' ministries have shared a partnership for the past 16 years and the signing of the agreement marked a major milestone in that partnership.

The two countries entered into agreements in 1995, with the aim of bolstering South Africa human resource requirements, especially in rural communities, through the recruitment of Cuban doctors.

Later, other initiatives allowed for South African medical students to train in Cuba.

To date, 304 medical doctors have been produced out of 808 recruited in the programme, with 406 currently undergoing medical training in Cuba; 98 are doing final clinical training in local medical schools and 34 medical students are graduating this year.

Cuba has the capacity to train as many as 1000 South African students a year. South Africa is expected to send 500 students in September but that number could still increase.

In addition, both ministries agreed to resume the recruitment of Cuban doctors to work in South African hospitals after the initiative "stalled" a few years ago.

According to Motsoaledi, the South African counterpart has identified close to 208 posts in different specialities where these doctors will be posted. A team of experts will soon visit Cuba to work with Cuban experts to identify suitable professionals.