



SOUTH AFRICA

LISTEN | ‘Prioritise health’: unemployed doctors call out government for misallocation of funds

06 February 2024 - 19:15



Bulelani Nonyukela





According to South African Medical Association Trade Union (SamatuAMATU) which represents doctors throughout the country, as of January there were 825 unemployed doctors.

Image: 123RF/AKKAMULATOR

With government saying there are no funds to hire doctors, qualified unemployed doctors say the government should bail out the health sector as with Eskom and other public entities.

Listen to the cries:

ADVERTISEMENT

Dr Sanelisiwe Shozi, who studied at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, has been without a job since the beginning of 2023 and has been looking for employment in government. He feels the state is not willing to help the sector: “This is not an issue of finance, it’s an issue of horrible mismanagement of funds from government.”

An unemployed doctor from Tsomo, Eastern Cape, spoke anonymously to TimesLIVE. He was sent by the government to study medicine in Cuba. He returned

to Eastern Cape to complete his internship because he says he wanted to fulfil his promise to serve rural people. He dismissed reports that doctors do not want to work in rural areas.

According to South African Medical Association Trade Union (Samatu) which represents doctors throughout the country, as of January there were 825 unemployed doctors. Deputy president of Samatu Dr Nkateko Mnisi said they are concerned that there are no funds, as this compromises health as a public commodity.

“There’s been many public entities that have found themselves at risk and have been bailed out; we speak about entities such as Eskom, such as SAA. Is the health of our community, is the health of South Africans not important? I feel it is highly important and we urge that government and our leaders take action to bail out healthcare.”

The union, as well as the other unemployed doctors, dismissed a claim by the health department that young doctors reject rural employment. Last month the department said: “Several vacant posts are in rural areas, places that some prefer to sit out for a year, rather than venture into unfamiliar territory. This is a yearly problem, where some young doctors reject rural placements using a variety of reasons.”

The Health and Allied Workers Indaba Trade Union (Haitu) also released a statement rebuking the health department for “lying”: “The health department must be strongly condemned for shamelessly peddling lies and for scapegoating junior doctors for their own joblessness.”

Haitu said they condemn “the mindless macroeconomic policies which this ANC government has implemented for 30 years. They are implementing austerity measures and cutting back on public spending. They are doing this, even if it means that we do not have enough doctors and nurses in our

hospitals. If patients are dying because of the collapsing healthcare system, the blame sits squarely with this government, which has taken a decision to sacrifice the health and wellbeing of the majority of people, in the name of austerity". It said politicians have opted out of the public healthcare system, demanding that public health officials be forced to use public health instead of private healthcare.

Presenting the health department budget vote last year, minister Joe Phaahla said the health sector is underfunded, citing the Covid-19 pandemic and load-shedding.

"The 2023/24 budget allocation for national department of health shows a decline of R4.4bn, from R64.5bn in 22/23 to R60.1bn in 2023/24."

Finance minister Enoch Godongwana, will table the national budget speech later this month. The ministry said "the budget allocation aims to strike a balance between growing the economy and supporting the vulnerable amid limited resources". The ministry asked the public to **share suggestions** on the budget and submit their views.

ADVERTISEMENT