



Greater need private, public sector co-operation

Health minister, Dr Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, has warned that if there was no change in the manner in which the private and public healthcare sectors in South Africa interacted, there would be a decline in access and quality.

Addressing members of the KZN Managed Care Coalition (KZNMCC) at the Durban-based doctor group's recent agm and seminar week-end, Tshabalala-Msimang said that this was a key motivation behind the proposed Social Health Insurance (SHI), i.e. restructure the funding of healthcare to make cover affordable to all.

The public health sector budget of R48,1 billion, she pointed out, catered for about 38 million South Africans whereas private sector expenditure – which benefited only seven million mainly urban based people, amounted to more than R50 billion. From this it was clear that the approximate R100 billion spend available was not benefiting all the country's citizens in an equitable manner.

Through the SHI, the minister added, the government intended creating a greater consistency between private and public sources of funding. Main objective would be to enable more people to participate in risk pools as opposed to paying for essential healthcare out of their pockets.

Public, private partnerships a Pan African concern

The challenge to the private healthcare sector across the African continent is to develop more effective models of care, delegates to the Pan African Health 2005 Conference in Midrand during May, were told.

Dr Smangaliso Hlenga, of Nepad's healthcare sector, said that Africa faces huge challenges in preventable diseases which block economic and social development, "Investment in healthcare is preventative not consumptive, it is not a drain on the bottom line," he added.

While it was Nepad's role to facilitate healthcare initiatives, the responsibility lay with individual countries to implement plans to strengthen their healthcare systems: "The potential of the private sector has not been harnessed but, at the same time, the private sector has not yet demonstrated its full worth," said Hlenga.

"The challenge to the private sector is to develop more effective models of care. We need to move to a more affordable system of social health, and convincing examples are needed from the private sector to show that they can assist in this regard."

Speaking at the same event, Nick Sheppard, of the Commission for Africa, cited the vicious circle of interlocking problems besetting Africa. Any solutions in healthcare and other areas also needed to be comprehensive and interlocking.

More than one third of people suffering from HIV/Aids live in Africa, and a coherent response was essential, addressing among other aspects the power relations between men and women and young children.

"Single one-off initiatives are often a waste of effort," Sheppard added.

"Funding should be long-term and geared to building up the foundations of health systems underlying the African Union and Nepad strategy.

African culture has big role in HIV/AIDS management – Sher



Prof Rubin Sher, one of South Africa's best known HIV/AIDS management authorities for more than two decades, believes that the concept of the Africanisation of medical care, or the application of African culture, will offer major benefits to both carers and sufferers.

Prof Sher is now medical director of the Disease Management Foundation.

"In the context of hospital care, particularly as pertaining to HIV/AIDS," Sher noted during the recent Pan African Health 2005 conference in Midrand, "Africanisation strives to mobilise substantial familial support, and to provide a preferred diet within customary conditions to deliver holistic healthcare.

"In this way," he explained, "Africanisation of hospital care in the era of HIV/Aids aims to shift the structured medical care from sterile hospital environments to familiar family settings and thereby to facilitate and to sustain recovery and to prolong longevity. This will reduce the load on hospitals, with a resultant saving in the cost of healthcare.

"Africanisation creates an enabling environment for holistic care in the struggle to stem the tide of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Any efforts that do not take cognisance of the culture of the people of Africa," Sher warned, "are doomed to failure."

Doctor arrested for practising illegally

An East Rand medical practitioner, who had been deregistered by the Health Professions Council of SA (HPCSA) in early May after being found guilty of medical aid fraud, was arrested later in the month for continuing to practise despite being erased from the register.

The Council has noted in a media release on this development that Dr Mohamed Amin Ahmed kept seeing patients at his Actonville surgery after his erasure and was subsequently arrested by members of the SAPS - accompanied by Council officials - on 19 May 2005.

He appeared in Court the following day where he was granted a R 1000 bail and had his case postponed to 22 July 2005: "Although he appealed against the Council ruling a day before his arrest," the media statement adds, "he cannot practice as the penalty imposed remains until the appeal is finalised.

Dr Ahmed became the second practitioner in less than two months to be arrested for defying HPCSA ruling by practising without being registered. In March, a Johannesburg dentist, Dr Preshotman Kasavelu Maistry, was also arrested for seeing patients after being deregistered.

Practising without being registered with the HPCSA is illegal and constitutes a criminal offence as it is in contravention of the Health Professions Act of 1974.

Organisation to accelerate transformation in healthcare

The Black Healthcare Caucus (BHC), an organization created to represent and promote the interests of black healthcare professionals and entrepreneurs, was launched in Johannesburg at the end of May.

Aimed at pulling together black healthcare providers who are making a contribution towards the transformation of the healthcare industry, the new body's main purpose will be to accelerate transformation within the industry through cooperation between the public and private sector.

Speaking at the launch function - attended by Gauteng Health MEC, Dr. Gwen Ramokgopa, senior officials from the Department of Health and business leaders - Yvonne Motsisi, chairperson of the caucus said: "Our aim is to partner with government to assist with the delivery of quality and affordable healthcare to all South Africans - especially the indigent and the unemployed,"

Motsisi said that although government had already made significant progress in transforming the industry, there are still key challenges that need to be resolved. "Access to medical schemes is diminishing in real terms. Medical schemes provide financing for almost seven million people but membership figures have declined as a percentage of the general population," she said.

The BHC will be managed by an executive committee comprising Yvonne Motsisi (director: Medscheme), Shad Mapetla (president: Black Pharmaceutical Forum), Dr. Judy Dlamini (chairperson: Mbekani), Simon Morule (director: Biotech Laboratories), Dr. Jackie Mphafudi (chief operating officer: Mvelapahanda Group), Dr. Peter Matseke (CEO: Clinix), Dr. Anna Mokgokong (chairperson: Community Investment Group), Mpumi Sowazi (director: Biovac), and Dr. Aquina Thulare, director: SAMDP.

DOH director disputes pharmacy research results

Results of a telephonic survey conducted by the Pharmaceutical Society of SA (PSSA) which found that more than 89% of pharmacists were considering closing down mainly because of the pricing regulations, have been reportedly disputed by the current Department of Health director responsible for the regulations, Dr Anban Pillay.

According to media reports on the results released in early June, Pillay - who is the department's director of pharmaceutical economic evaluations - contended that an informal verbal survey would not produce sufficient evidence on the purported dilemma facing pharmacists.

Altogether 400 pharmacies were surveyed, 77,6% of which reflected a decrease in turnover with 53,3% indicating that they would consider closing shop within the next six months.

In line with statements made earlier in an exclusive interview with the new private healthcare sector magazine, **Health Management Review Africa**, Pillay reiterates that he had problems with the research that the pharmacists used for the court case last year and that these were basically the same people responsible for the telephonic research.

These survey results, he reportedly adds, were simply an attempt to gain sympathy from the Constitutional Court judges whose ruling had yet to be made.

Sex no longer 'culture of secrecy'

Sexual health and wellness have become both critical social and physiological considerations and as such should be respected by both the medical profession and the media alike.

This was the general consensus of a unique workshop involving leading sexual health practitioners and media representatives in Limpopo province during June.

The importance of sexual health and wellness from a medical viewpoint was emphasised by noted Durban practitioner, Dr Prithy Ramlachan, who set the scene by giving the World Health Organisation's definition of sexual health:

"There exist fundamental rights for the individual, including the right to sexual health and a capacity to enjoy and control sexual and reproductive behavior in accordance with a social personal ethic

- freedom from fear, shame, guilt, false beliefs and other factors inhibiting sexual response and impairing sexual relationships
- freedom from organic disorders, disease and deficiencies that interfere with sexual and reproductive function"

Much of the discussions revolved around the Bayer sponsored TV documentary, "Sex etc", featured weekly on MNet with well-known Johannesburg sexologist, Dr Elna McIntosh, giving guidance and comments on the situations presented.

"We need programmes like this and other media assistance to basically highlight some of the problems that exist and more importantly," said McIntosh, "convey the message that there is help at hand."

Adding to this, Pretoria clinical psychologist/sexologist Eugene Viljoen said that sex was no longer a culture of secrecy. *Sex etc.* is presented on MNet every Wednesday night at 22h00.