

## Getting Going With The New South Africa

Twenty two Acts of the old parliament, relating to health matters, are up for repeal or amendment in a new Health Act that has reached the stage of a second draft discussion document.

It deals with three levels. At the National and Provincial levels, both policy councils and health advisory committees are proposed. A welcome feature is that representatives from various sectors who previously had no voice are proposed for the advisory committees. These include statutory bodies, the academic community, private financiers and providers of health services, non-governmental organisations, and professional and health worker associations and trade unions.

It is proposed that the policy councils shall make the bills and the advisory bodies shall investigate and make recommendations to the minister on matters referred to it. The advisory committees may however, also of their own accord, consider or investigate a matter.

At the third level, Health Districts are proposed with district health councils, on which representatives of community health committees will sit. These councils will oversee and evaluate the performance of local authorities.

Local Authorities will provide services from the level of community hospitals to other facilities at community level in order to deliver comprehensive primary health care. The document makes it clear that these services are:

- any personal health service which is normally provided by a general practitioner to any person, whether or not a patient is in a hospital, including preventive health services and the promotion of health;
- environmental health services.

A community hospital is defined as "a hospital which provides general practitioner services, and specialist services in exceptional circumstances".

The last major change to the Health Act was in 1977. This one will also have a long and healthy lifespan. Now is the time to debate and influence the course of events, not after the event!

*Sam Johnson*

S O U T H A F R I C A N  
FAMILY  
PRACTICE