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## *From the editor • Van die redakteur*

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### **Whither primary health care/ general practice**

It is many months since a committee, to advise the Minister on matters of Primary Health Care, was announced. We keep hearing on the media about privatisation and bodies to “supervise” the standards of private hospitals. Big new academic hospitals continue to progress but not a word about a policy committee.

Privatisation is happening by default into a non-system as far as Primary Health Care is concerned. To privatise health services by the withdrawal of funds from the public sector without a coherent plan is just not good enough. We still remain with millions of people who will be the responsibility of state in whatever system of health care we opt for. If we continue with our present lack of planning our system will continue to deteriorate. Presently, many problems that can easily be dealt with in a primary setting, move up to district and even tertiary hospitals, to be dealt with at much greater expense. In hard times most thoughtful countries will expand the basic health services to save money on the total budget. The Alma-Ata declaration calls for a clear national policy as a prerequisite on the road to “Health for All”.

South Africa needs to go beyond statements and lipservice towards the importance of general practice/primary health care. We need some hard-nosed planning towards a policy that will have an influence on budgets, manpower distribution and education for all in the health team. We are in dire need of a coherent policy that will prevent us from becoming one of the starkest examples of fragmentation, disorganisation and double standards, in a situation of relative affluence from a world perspective. There must be a better way to spend our health rand in South Africa. At the moment we seem to lack the will to do something about it.

*Sam Fehrer*