

Press Statement: 14 June 2011

RHAP AND RUDASA JOIN SAMA'S DEMANDS FOR URGENT SAFETY MEASURES TO PROTECT OUR HEALTH CARE WORKERS FROM ASSAULT

The South African Medical Association has called for marches tomorrow morning in Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town to protest against unsafe working conditions for health care workers leading to avoidable risks of assault. The Rural Doctors Association of Southern Africa and the Rural Health Advocacy Project stand firmly behind the demands by SAMA and the Junior Doctors Association of South Africa for the Government to take measures to ensure greater safety of our health care workers.

The murder of Dr Mkhize of Middelburg Hospital in Mpumalanga on the 7th of June this year does not come in isolation. Dr Mkhize died after being stabbed by a patient in his consulting room. In December 2010 a 35-year old female doctor got raped by a minor during night shift at Pelonomi Hospital in Bloemfontein. In 2007 a medical student got attacked and raped at Baragwanath Hospital in Johannesburg. In all cases improved safety and security was called for. Yet, attacks on health care workers continue to take place. In the meantime, the promised improved safety measures have still not been implemented at Middelburg Hospital.

It is unacceptable that health care workers have to feel unsafe in hospitals and clinics while reasonable measures can be put in place to minimize the risks of assaults. We support SAMA in demanding for:

- Skilled, qualified hospital managers with experience in health management;
- Fencing around hospitals and the installation of metal detectors at controlled entry point;
- Surveillance cameras and good lighting in all corridors, passages, parking and dark corners;
- Appointment of qualified security companies that are accountable to hospital management.

South Africa is faced with a severe human resources for health crisis, with 50% of medical graduates leaving the country, 75% of remaining doctors choosing private sector, and a mere 35 doctors ending up in rural public facilities. Many health care workers feel unappreciated and unsupported. Prioritizing the safety of our health workforce is of critical urgency to stop losing more health workers from the public health sector.

Tomorrow's protest marches are a last resort by health care workers who no longer accept unsafe workplaces. We support the right to protest, and acknowledge the urgency for improved safety in public health facilities. However, we call on SAMA and health care workers to ensure that the protest marches do not cripple already understaffed rural hospitals, compromising the right of patients to health care. This march and the rights of health care workers to protest reminds us of the failure to agree on a minimum service level agreement (MSLA). We call on a MSLA to be agreed upon by the State and the Unions with utmost urgency, more so in the wake of the current public sector wage negotiations taking place.

STATEMENT ENDORSED BY SECTION27

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