



Rural Doctor's Association of Southern Africa

"Inspiring others to rural health"

PRESS STATEMENT JUNE 2019: CALL FOR DIALOGUE WITH DOCTORS IN NORTH WEST PROVINCE

RUDASA supports the principle that all doctors are responsible for using "best practice" for direct patient intervention, as well as ensuring appropriate health services for their local population. In order for this to happen doctors need to have the support of their line managers/district manager/provincial managers, as well as adequate budget and/or resources. When these support systems are not in place, or fail to provide adequate and timely resources on a continuous basis, despite the persistent efforts of the doctor, such that it threatens the health of patients, then doctors have a moral and ethical duty to:

- Seek advice and mentoring from fellow doctors. These mentors may be doctors working at the same level of care, line managers, specialists in specific disease or health systems, or doctors forums. This is both to reduce the stress an individual doctor feels as well as to provide insight into root causes and possible solutions.
- Report upwards: when administration processes are not followed through or stall then doctors have an ethical responsibility to report upwards
- Whistle blow: when the same problems continue over long periods of time despite using "normal channels" then doctors should bring these problems to the attention of the public as this affects "health for all".

Doctors working for the Department of Health are well aware of the inherent weaknesses in the current system and seek ways to improve the system in order to improve the health outcomes of their patients. RuDASA supports open and transparent discussion of health system issues by doctors with other doctors, management, and patient advocacy organisations. Working together is the only way that the problems will be solved.

With regard to North West Province:

1. Whilst recognising that North West inherited an unequal and poorly resourced health system there is still much work to be done: Stockouts of essential medication has been an ongoing problem for several years, as has recruiting and retaining doctors (and other health workers) for rural areas, especially PHC and District Hospitals. The lack of change creates health problems for patients, stress for those doctors working in these facilities, and low morale, and gives doctors no option but to bring the problem to the public eye.
2. By bringing health system issues to the attention of the Department of Health and public eye the doctors are perceived to be "health activists"; and rather than working together with the doctors the Department of Health appears to use administrative processes to intimidate doctors to "be quiet", and sets itself up to be perceived as "anti change" or "sweeping the problems under the carpet".
3. The current situation now seems to be a "administration" vs "clinicians" with the administration questioning doctors integrity and ethical behaviour simply for trying to get the best service for the people of North West.

Doctors are by professional training seekers of "best practice" and innovative thinking. They should be applauded for bringing innovative solutions to existing problems in times crisis rather than criticised for "not doing in according to administrative protocols".

RuDASA commends Prof Ebrahim Variava for building a Department North West can be proud of, speaking out on rural inequity and continuing to support both specialists and medical officers at all levels of health care in South Africa. Doctors like Prof Variava are examples of "best practice health care" and should be listened to and nurtured rather than placed on "administrative leave".

We urge the Department of Health North West to re-instate Prof Ebrahim Variava, discuss a rescinding of resignation with Dr Mmuso Kgosi Mogwera (Job Shemangane Thabane Hospital) and to work together with all the doctors to review the system so that in this time of crisis the best health care can be offered as quickly as possible to the people of North West.