

Overdue, over-budget hospital in need of cash

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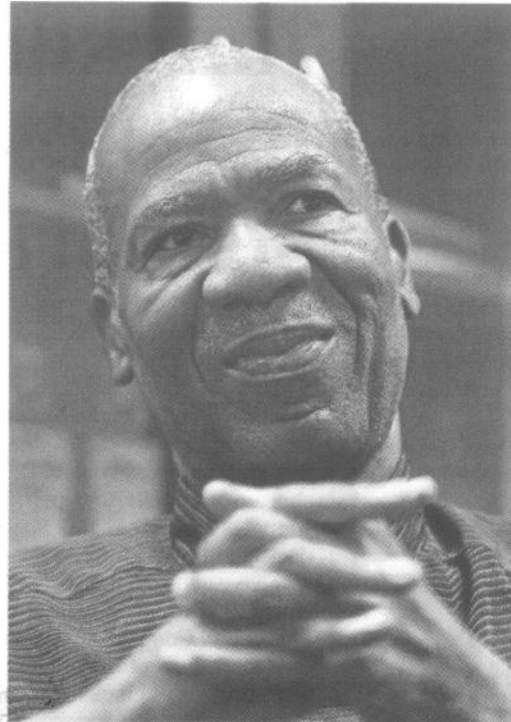
The Northern Cape health department will ask the Treasury for more money to fund the building of a mental health hospital that has been in construction for 11 years and has so far cost the fiscus close to R2bn.

Health Ombud Prof Malegapuru Makgoba's report into the deaths of more than 100 psychiatric patients in Gauteng highlighted how deadly SA's shortage of adequate mental health facilities could be to patients. The report was released in February.

Northern Cape MEC for health Lebogang James Motlhaping's spokesman, Lebogang Majaha, said on Wednesday that the department had prepared documentation motivating for the capital injection, which would be submitted to the chief procurement officer at the Treasury.

Majaha said a delegation from the province had appeared before the portfolio committee on health last week, when officials from the health department – as well as those from the provincial arm of roads and public works – said they had prepared the necessary papers for the national Department of Health. The national department would escalate the matter to the Treasury, he added.

But Majaha denied that construction had ground to a halt on the site because money had dried up, insisting that the contractor was steaming ahead.



Exposed:

Malegapuru Makgoba's report on deaths in Gauteng illustrated the extent to which inadequate facilities affected patients.

/Masi Losi

DA chairman in the Northern Cape Harold McGluwa said the department had overspent its construction budget, with the incomplete structure costing the taxpayers almost R2bn.

"At this price, the government could have opened [more than] 50 units ... at R35m each," said McGluwa.

Majaha challenged the DA to prove its allegation that the department's cost overruns had amounted to R2bn. "Their statement is misleading and devoid of any truth," said Majaha.

McGluwa drew attention to the plight of patients at West End Hospital who had been left "languishing" in what was almost a

prison because of a shortage of beds at the hospital.

This is despite the department having promised two years ago to open a new ward at the hospital.

"This ward has not been operationalised yet due to insufficient funds to equip it properly," he said. "Hundreds of patients in need of intensive psychiatric care are also forced to sit at home," he added.

Majaha said acutely mentally ill patients were admitted to West End on a case-by-case basis and a clinical team made judgment calls on patients' eligibility to be admitted.

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