

New forensic pathology lab to open mid-2019

Modern facility set to boost criminal evidence analysis

Athina May

THE DEPARTMENT of Transport and Public Works (DTPW) has announced that its R281 million project to replace the Forensic Pathology Services laboratory in Salt River, Cape Town, is well under way and is expected to be completed by mid-2019.

The foundations of the modern forensic pathology facility have now been laid in the project, which began in September 2017.

The completed facility will include 26 autopsy tables, four dissection suites with six tables each, as well as two teaching and training dissection suites.

The development of the pathology laboratory comes after concerns were raised by the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC) about the inability of the current pathology lab to release Muslim bodies in the allotted time, which hindered the delivering of Muslim burial

rights within the customary 12-hour period.

The Emergency Medical and Forensic Pathology Services spokesperson, Robert Daniels, said issues between the department and the council had already been resolved and bodies were being released within 24 hours.

"Natural deaths are not delayed and Muslim patient post-mortems are prioritised. When we had backlog issues, it was because of gang violence. Then we had 78 bodies at one period. The release of bodies (is) only delayed when there is police investigation into a case," said Daniels.

MJC spokeswoman Mishka Daries confirmed that issues experienced in the past with the delayed release of bodies had been resolved and the council's second deputy president, Shaykh Riad Fataar, had written a letter thanking provincial Health MEC Noma French Mbombo for her assistance in expediting the process.

"Muslim undertakers have reported the swift conclusion of autopsies on

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Muslim bodies within the requested 24-hour period. We hope and pray that this arrangement will continue indefinitely, thereby allowing the Muslim community to fulfil their cultural and religious practices," said Fataar.

The new centre is under construction at the entrance to Groote Schuur

Hospital. Once it is complete, the Observatory Forensic Pathology Institute will provide Level 4 forensic services aimed at extracting, analysing and preserving the integrity of evidence for use by the criminal justice system.

There will be 360 refrigerated body spaces, 180 admission fridges and 180 dispatch fridges. The building will be able to accommodate up to 100 visitors per day at the bereavement centre, and up to 10 waiting undertakers and up to 20 students at a time.

"The project makes use of labour-intensive methods that provide a number of short-term work opportunities and skills training for local people."

To date, R603 800 has been spent on targeted enterprises, R121 400 on targeted suppliers and R100 000 on targeted local labour, according to DTPW spokesperson Stephen Heyns.

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