

Official shifted after two babies die

Probe into lack of hospital oxygen

By **Mandla Khoza**

A public works official responsible for oxygen supply at Shongwe Hospital near Malelane in Mpumalanga, where two infants died, has apparently been removed from the facility.

Sowetan has learnt that the official was removed amid allegations that the cause of the babies' deaths was lack of oxygen in the hospital's ward where more than six premature babies had been admitted.

Officials at the hospital told Sowetan yesterday that oxygen bottles kept at the facility were working fine but that there was a problem with the oxygen getting into the incubators where the babies were kept.

"That's maybe what they should investigate.

"Someone messed it (oxygen) up," said a nurse from the hospital.

A senior official at the hospital confirmed to Sowetan that the person responsible for the supply of oxygen had been removed pending the outcome of an investigation.

Mpumalanga MEC for health Sasekani Manzini gave investigators until Friday to produce a report on the cause

of deaths. Provincial health department spokesperson Dumisani Malamule could not confirm if the official had been removed from the facility.

He said the investigation is covering all the allegations over the deaths.

The mother of one of the babies, Prudence Mokoena, 21, told Sowetan she watched helplessly as her baby's body started changing colour while fighting for her life in the incubator in the ward.

"There were about six premature babies with their mothers in the ward.

"Nurses told us to leave the ward as they said there was a shortage of oxygen.

"While we were outside,

they told us they were doing all they can [to save the lives of our children]. But at around 2am they called me separately and told me that my baby was no more," said the young mother from Mzinti village.

Mokoena's grandmother Lesaya Nkosi said there were reports that the hospital was not well-managed.

"They need to account for this. This child [Prudence] is shocked and cries a lot.

"Seeing her child die has affected her a lot," said Nkosi.

The hospital's board member, Vusi Ngwenya, expressed regret over the deaths.

He said the incident was unfortunate and investigations were continuing.