

Greenville hospital back to normal

BONGANI FUZILE

Everything is back to normal at Greenville hospital in Bizana in the Alfred Nzo District after residents accepted proposals made during an intervention by health MEC Sindiswa Gomba and public works MEC Babalo Madikizela.

Last week the hospital was shut down by angry residents who wanted locals to be employed at the hospital.

The protest also closed the adjacent gateway clinic, which is being prepared for the National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme.

Gomba agreed to include two members of the community in her investigation into residents' complaints of employment malpractice and nepotism, and issues with an entrenched and unresponsive hospital board, said Eastern Cape health communications director, Siyanda Manana.

The previous standoff left a health workforce of close to 50 people in limbo after community members entered the hospital premises and chased away staff. For their safety, nurses and doctors had to stay at home while patients were transferred to St Patrick's Hospital, 40km away. The Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa (Denosa) on Monday confirmed that they had issued a notice to their members to return to work. The union's pro-

vincial secretary, Khaya Sodidi, said everything would be back to normal this week.

"After the meeting last week on Thursday with the MECs, the stakeholders and the concerned community, a decision was taken that the residents had to put their protests on hold as the health MEC was trying to investigate and find solutions to the problems," said Sodidi.

One of the community leaders who led the protest, Thandeka Ngaleka, said everything had normalised.

She said: "The MEC's response was welcomed by the community and we've agreed to have a follow-up meeting with the district manager next week. The hospital is open but we still stand by what we are demanding."

Gomba and Madikizela rushed to the area to try and calm the situation last week.

In a statement issued on Friday, Gomba said the staff would undergo counselling "as they are traumatised".

The area, according to the Alfred Nzo District Health Plan, has an unemployment rate of 43.5% with more than half of those youth. Madikizela, who comes from the Alfred Nzo district, warned the protesters that in the process of voicing their rights they should be cautious about destroying the families of those they had evicted from the hospital.