

■ NEGLIGENCE

Bid to cap cost of botched public healthcare services

ROLAND MPOFU

GAUTENG Health MEC Dr Bandile Masuku will engage the judiciary to introduce a legislative framework that compels victims of medical negligence from the provincial healthcare system to be treated at public hospitals.

Currently, Gauteng Health is facing a massive R22 billion in lawsuits brought about by patients who had been incorrectly treated or had had botched operations at public hospitals.

Masuku admitted to instances where his department has been found guilty of negligence but questioned the current method of calculating compensation for damages incurred at public hospitals using private sector rates, saying it led to inflated claims that would drain his department's budget.

"Our attitude to the litigations is

that while we have been found guilty in some instances, we can bring down the costs because they are calculated using private sector rates, for example on how to treat a cerebral palsy patient over 10 or 20 years," said Masuku.

"We know as a matter of fact that private rates in most instances are overrated and unreasonable. The Competition Commission declared that these costs should come down because it's quite unfair to take a bit from the public purse to pay private hospitals and private doctors."

Masuku was speaking to the Sunday Independent on Wednesday after delivering his inaugural R50.8bn budget vote speech for the 2019/20 financial year.

"We are going to propose to the justice system to introduce a law, a legislative framework in our province

to say that patients who have had adverse experiences within our system should be treated by us in central hospitals where sub-specialties and specialists reside.

"Currently we are working on Charlotte Maxeke, Steve Biko, Chris Hani Baragwanath and George Mukhari hospitals to be the centres where patients that need future treatment need to go to," said Masuku.

Part of his plan to keep the costs down is to discourage patients from running to courts for litigation and to first consider mediation as a way of redressing incidents of medical negligence in public healthcare.

Some of the issues Masuku said his budget will prioritise include improving patient experience at public health facilities and the upgrading of health infrastructure to the tune of over R1bn,

covering maintenance and refurbishment. He also promised to reinforce safety and security at hospitals and said R600m was set aside to secure patients and staff.

He said they would also prioritise the filling of critical posts.

"A total of 1 974 posts will be filled in the current financial year with an allocation of R778m. This amount also includes the grants for the Extended Public Works Programme," Masuku said.

The MEC called on medical professionals to volunteer in the public health sector to improve the quality of healthcare in Gauteng.

"I will lead from the front by dedicating one day per month to do voluntary clinical work across the province," said Masuku, who is a specialist in gynaecology.