

# Bhisho told to demolish 'apartheid-like' mental health cells

**SOYISO MALITI**  
SENIOR POLITICAL REPORTER  
soyisom@dispatch.co.za

Demolish “apartheid-like” solitary confinement prison cells at Cecilia Makiwane Hospital mental health unit and relocate nursing students housed at an inhabitable residence in East London.

These are some of the recommendations by the Public Service Commission to the Eastern Cape department of health. The recommendations are in a report that was released by PSC provincial commissioner Lulu Sizani to health MEC Sindiswa Gomba in Bhisho on Tuesday.

Gomba welcomed the report, saying when the PSC boss visited the mental health unit, the MEC had already beaten her to it and had either been in the process of fixing some of the issues, or had already done so.

Sizani said she was happy with the MEC's plan for turning things around at the mental health unit.

The Daily Dispatch previously reported on the dire state of the mental health unit at the Mdantsane hospital and on how nursing students staying in Nerina House hostel at Frere Hospital were living in such filth it posed a health hazard. They also felt their security was at risk as there were no guards.

Gomba said the Dispatch exposé on Nerina was the first time she had heard about the state of the place as she had only just been sworn in as MEC. After inspecting the residence and Cecilia Makiwane Hospital, the PSC found that while there were CCTV cameras at the Cecilia Makiwane, none of them were working, meaning the wellbeing of mental patients could not be monitored.

“Some patients in the male psychiatric ward were lying on concrete or cement floors basking in the sun, and the PSC found this to be an unacceptable way of treating patients.

“There were no beds allocated to the restraint and seclusion rooms. Floors in the secluded areas were just cement, with no carpets and mattresses. There was inadequate ventilation in the seclusion area.

“Also of concern to the PSC is that the secluded areas ... were designed like apartheid secluded prison cells and such structures are not good places for

healing and rehabilitation,” the report read.

“Cecilia Makiwane Hospital should demolish the seclusion wards and replace them with environmentally-friendly rooms that are provided with the necessary equipment.”

The report recommends that the mental health unit building, which is an eyesore, receive a major facelift “as the conditions outside the old building reflect the high degree ... of uncleanness and years of lack of maintenance”.

Gomba said a clinical head to manage the mental health unit would be appointed before the end of the year as interviews had already been done.

On Nerina House, the report details how nurses lived under unbearable conditions with rubbish that had not been collected for months.

When the Dispatch visited the hostel earlier this year, piles of rubbish could be seen in most of the rooms. Some students told of how they used buckets to relieve themselves as the toi-

**There were no beds allocated to the restraint and seclusion rooms. Floors in the secluded areas were just cement, with no carpets and mattresses. There was inadequate ventilation in the seclusion area**

lets were blocked.

“Of concern is that students prepare their meals under these dire health conditions,” the report noted, recommending that Bhisho relocate the students within 30 days and the building receives a facelift.

There should also be guards securing the building, the PSC recommended.

Gomba said from December 10, after final exams, the building would be shut for a revamp. She said public works had allocated R20m for it.

On the advice of structural engineers, Gomba said the department need not demolish Nerina House.