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# Health committee demands answers after hospital visits

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STAFF shortages and the impact it has on patients receiving care was observed at Prince Mshiyeni Hospital last week by members of the Health Portfolio Committee who were conducting oversight visits to health facilities in the province.

Committee members from the provincial legislature who visited Prince Mshiyeni and RK Khan hospitals said it was disheartening to see frail and elderly patients waiting in long lines.

"What we saw there was terrible and there is no way to hide it. The overflow of patients and testimony of those waiting is just not acceptable," said committee chairperson Nomakiki Majola of what she saw at Prince Mshiyeni.

She added that while the department was rolling out the e-filing system, there appeared to be not enough staff to capture patient information at the hospital when they visited.

In addition, the committee was informed that a R45 million project by the Public Works Department to repair a leaking roof at RK Khan Hospital had not taken place, leading to the transfer of some patients to Clairwood Hospital, which was also battling to cope with the load.

The observations have prompted the committee to seek an urgent meeting with KZN Health MEC Nomagugu Simelane.

Unions said under-staffing in hospitals was nothing new.

Ntokozo Nxumalo, KZN deputy chairperson of the National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union, said they had been raising the issue of under-staffing at Prince Mshiyeni hospital for years.

"What is happening at Prince Mshiyeni Hospital is found in most public health-care facilities in the province. What the committee members saw last week is something that has been experienced for years, and something that we have raised a number of times," said Nxumalo.

He said addressing staff shortages also demanded a level of political will on the part of the government.

KZN chairperson of the Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa, Sibonelo Cele, also called into question the political will on the part of the department's leadership in dealing with staff shortages at Prince Mshiyeni.

He noted that the hospital had one of the largest intakes of patients in the province, something which he said presented opportunities to lobby for funding.

"The fact that the hospital has patients who have been referred to it by other hospitals, with some patients coming from as far as the Eastern Cape, and is only second to Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital, means there is room to lobby the National Treasury to provide funding that will go towards getting

more staff," he said.

Cele said the problems at RK Khan Hospital reflected the slow pace of the Public Works Department in doing its work.

DA committee member Edwin Baptie said the visits had exposed the glaring weaknesses and lamented the failure to deal with repair projects.

"Today, some four years later, the work has barely commenced. The impact of this failed project has left the hospital short of four wards, two theatres and about 170 beds.

"Patients had to be moved to Clairwood Hospital and others accommodated in the outpatients department," Baptie said.

IFP committee member Thokozile Gumede said under-staffing at Prince Mshiyeni showed that there was a need to have another health facility in uMlazi because the population that was serviced had grown rapidly.

Majola indicated that following their

findings they would call for a meeting with the department, along with Public Works, as soon as there was a slot in the KZN Legislature schedule.

Health Department spokesperson Ntokozo Maphisa said the implementation of the e-filing process involved the overhaul of the department's entire system, and it was a work in process, adding that challenges were expected when rolling out such a project.

"It is worth noting that Prince Mshiyeni Memorial Hospital caters for an extremely large catchment area, and is among the country's biggest hospitals, which may lead to technical challenges from time to time, which forces us to use the manual system," he added.

According to the spokesperson, the roof repairs at RK Khan Hospital, which had begun, stalled because the contractor could not finish the work and had abandoned the site. He said the department was in the process of appointing another contractor.