

Budget Vote 18: Health

Speech by Lindy Wilson MP, DA Shadow Deputy Minister of Health

Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall.
Humpty Dumpty took a great fall.
All the Kings Horses and all the kings' men,
Couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again.

Yes, it is an old nursery rhyme that tells of an egg falling off a wall and cracking and smashing as it hit the floor. And all the kings' horses and kings' men, had no idea of how to put him together again.

It is the perfect example of what has happened to the South African Health sector in recent years. Humpty is Health, It has fallen, cracked, and broken ... and none of the President's men know how to fix it again.

And while the Presidents men stand by and scratch their heads, the increasingly, poor and vulnerable South Africans bear the brunt of a broken health system.

Where does one even start to discuss the brokenness, let alone how to fix it. You have to understand what broke it in the first place.

Let's start with corruption. It is over a year since Babita Deokaran was gunned down for exposing the deep corruption and the ridiculous over pricing of goods supplied to the Tembisa Hospital.

Over a year, and the matter is still under SIU investigation, and to date, not one of the Companies cited in her expose have been blacklisted by the Department. So the corruption continues unabated.

Medical Negligence claims have run into billions ... BILLIONS. Complainants are winning cases on the fact that no files or information can be found at hospitals. But, it is now clear that the doctors and senior personnel are complicit in some of the claims and working with unscrupulous lawyers, stealing files and falsifying information. And they are getting away with it. Why? Because of short staffing and impractical record keeping and storage of information. It has also become abundantly clear that State employed doctors spend more time in their private practices than at the hospitals they are employed to serve. Can the President's men, put it together again. Not likely.

Between the corruption, legal fees and loss of suits on medical negligence, millions and millions of rands have been lost to health departments, at the price of quality health care to the poor and vulnerable. Health is broken, and the President's men can't fathom how to put it back together again.

One of the President's Men, the Minister himself, revealed a backlog of 7 years for orthopaedic surgeries, which include fractures, knee replacements and hip replacements. People are living in unbelievable pain, and often end up with walking aids and wheelchairs. They cannot function optimally and some have lost their jobs as a result.

Cancer patients requiring mastectomies and other cancer related surgeries will have to wait between 1 and 2 years for life saving surgeries. It is common knowledge that in order to arrest the spread of cancer, biopsies and removal of tumours and masses must be done as quickly as possible. Life expectancy of cancer patients is seriously affected by this appalling state of affairs, and those that could have good lives if treatments are done immediately, will be denied this.

Hysterectomies can take up to 2 years, cataract removals up to 3 years and the list goes on. Humpty Health fell off the wall, and the President's men cannot put it back together again.

Section 27 of the Constitution deals with health care, food, water and social security and states clearly that everyone has the right to have access to health care services, including reproductive health care. It further states that no one may be refused emergency medical treatment.

In terms of Section 9, everyone has the right to equality, including access to health care services, which means that individuals should not be unfairly excluded in the provision of health care.

I say to you, the President's men, people are being denied reasonable access to life saving surgeries and denial of quality of life in the case of orthopaedic and other critical surgeries.

Millions have been spent on the National Health Insurance Bill, with failed pilot projects, public hearings and the appointment of staff for the NHI. This money could have been used to upgrade facilities with staff and infrastructure to avoid this crisis. The President and his men are trying to put Health together again with the NHI ... it will not stick.

The Bill is clear. Only those hospitals and facilities that meet compliance standards can be included in the NHI. May I say to the Presidents men, you cannot pass the Bill. The majority of the hospitals and clinics in the country are not compliant. The Office of Health Standards compliance, this by their own admission, advised that they cannot get to all the health facilities, due to the lack of staffing and resources.

So what then, President's men? If you pass the Bill and continue, without Health being compliant, you are going to breach the very Bill you seek to pass. This will have consequences, be sure.

The Bill also seeks to establish numerous boards, all reporting to the President's men, at a cost of millions. They must all be in place, long before the NHI can roll out.

And tell me all the President's men, from where ... and how ... will this be paid. You have yet to tell us.

All the while the poor and suffering sit amongst the rubble of a broken humpty.

All the while, the DA has put on the table resolutions to fix the Health systems, stop the corruption and provide Universal Health Coverage – without the NHI. But the Presidents men choose to ignore this. I say this to the people, change your vote, or continue to suffer.

I thank you.