# NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION NO. 2441**

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**(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 24)**

**Ms M D Hlengwa (IFP) to ask the Minister of Health:**

Whether, considering that public hospitals and mortuaries have been burdened with unclaimed corpses and noting that corpses are now decomposing at a faster rate due to loadshedding, his department has put any measures in place to ensure that such facilities are not burdened and overpopulated with unclaimed corpses; if not, why not; if so, what (a) measures and (b) steps has his department taken to trace the families of the deceased? **NW2779E**

**REPLY:**

The public hospitals and forensic pathology mortuaries have continuous backup generator capacity. This helps mitigate the potential of mortal remains decomposing. There are continuous discussions with ESKOM to exempt public hospitals and Forensic pathology mortuaries from loadshedding. Most of the decomposed bodies are received by forensic pathology mortuaries mostly due to these bodies being discovered in public spaces after a longtime.

1. **Measures taken to trace families for both public hospitals and forensic pathology mortuaries.**

* In relation to Forensic Pathology Mortuaries, all unclaimed bodies are managed according to (i) the regulations for rendering Forensic Pathology Services (No R341 of 2005) – Section 43, 44, and 45 and (ii) the National Code of Guidelines for Forensic Pathology Practice in South Africa – Chapter 13 Section 460 to 464.
* It is the mandate of the South African Police Service (SAPS) to manage all unidentified cases from both the public hospitals and Forensic Pathology Service facilities. The SAPS has the competency of identification and tracing of families.

**(b) Steps taken by the Department of Health to trace the families of the deceased?**

The Department of Health collaborates with the SAPS, Department of Home Affairs (for finger prints), Department of Social Development (for tracing of families) and local municipalities (for paupers’ burial where families are not successfully traced).

The steps are as follows:

* In case of an unclaimed body where there are addresses provided, their next of kin are contacted.
* Tracing is also done by the social worker using details provided by the hospital.
* Community development/health workers are also used in tracing at last address that was given on the deceased patient’s file.
* The unclaimed deceased details and photos also get published through public media outlets.
* Should the tracing not be successful, the deceased’s DNA is extracted and sent to the SAPS Forensic Science Laboratory for storage in the database for future reference. It is only at this stage that the Department of Health makes an application to the Municipality for a Pauper burial.

END.