

## THE DOWNSIDE OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM

*One of the major stories last month was that of an incident that occurred in a township in Kwa-Zulu Natal, where a patient passed away while waiting in the clinic line for several hours without being attended to. Although this may come as a shock to many, but such incidents occur often in public healthcare facilities. Many patients also get turned away because it seems like their illnesses are not that 'serious' and unfortunately meet their demise. This is caused by the fact that public health facilities are struggling because of the limited number of facilities and number of staff. There is a huge struggle in meeting the demand of the high volume of patients that require medical assistance in a day. South Africa has large communities, whether black, Indian, coloured, and white and many rely on the public health system due to certain factors, including the high costs of private health and many people being unable to afford. Another factor is that many South Africans are unemployed and have no income which instinctively requires them to use the public health facilities such as public hospitals, government, and municipal clinics.*

*The state of our healthcare system as a country requires great improvement, taking into consideration that as of 2022 it was reported that 15,8 percent of the South African population has medical aid cover. This immediately highlights the pressure in the public health facilities and the declining service being offered to the public and the conditions of the facilities. There have been many reports circulating over the years about the substandard conditions of public hospitals and clinics, where there has been very little progress in rectifying them. Although the public health system has its faults, we cannot overrule the fact that it does a great job in rolling out free medication to the South African public. They are committed to ensuring that communities receive safe and effective medication and vaccinations. Medications are costly but many people receive treatment for chronic illnesses such as HIV/AIDS, diabetes, high blood pressure and many more without paying for it. This is a positive factor in the healthcare system of South Africa, but we cannot ignore there is a major cry for an increase in the number of public hospitals and clinics. A great example is Prince Mshiyeni Memorial Hospital situated in Umlazi, for many years this facility has been known for overcrowding. It services many communities like Umlazi, Folweni, Umgababa, Umbumbulu, Isipingo and others. Each of these communities have high populations and high rates of unemployment which by default states that the people there rely on the public health system. This has put a lot of pressure on this facility for many years, where people encounter problems, such as overcrowding and therefore cannot be admitted despite the critical states of their illnesses.*

*No problem is without a solution, but a lot of willingness is required. The opening of Unjani Clinics has proven to be one of the noteworthy solutions, it speaks to job creation and providing affordable healthcare. The country needs more of such facilities and public hospitals to move forward and advance in healthcare while minimizing the issue of overcrowding in healthcare facilities. As the Chinese proverb states "the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."*

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