

Without investment in primary healthcare, we will never improve the lives of our people

By Haseena Ismail MP – DA Member on the Portfolio Committee on Health

Honourable House Chair, when I visited Mama Elsie last week I found her ill and groaning with pain. When I recommended that she get medical assistance, she advised that she had spent the entire day, starting out before sunrise, at the clinic. After more than 8 hours, she eventually got to see a Doctor.

Mama sat, in pain, on uncomfortable benches, with no food and no answers. She said the nurses were very unresponsive and unhelpful. When she finally thought she would be helped, she was advised that the medication prescribed to her was out of stock, she would have to come back later.

The thought of trying to find taxi money out of her grant and another day in a long queue, had made her feel worse.

This is just one victim of our collapsed health system. It would appear that the mandate of this department is to ensure that the poor and vulnerable, remain ill and unattended to.

Healthcare is a Constitutional right, and this department cannot even get the bare basics right.

No Ubuntu and Batho Pele principles are applied, just unprofessional and uncaring attitudes towards patients.

I then met Sis Jabu. Pregnant and in labour, she rushed to her clinic for assistance. Due to a lack of beds and a lack of staffing, she was advised that she needed to go by ambulance to the hospital. An ambulance was called and Jabu was sent outside to wait for it. With water broken and in the final throes of labour, no ambulance arrived. Baby Siyabonga was born outside the clinic. The ambulance arrived 3 hours later.

I dread to contemplate if there would have been any complications, had there not been any other patients around to assist.

The EMS services in our health system are dreadful and altogether dysfunctional. Yet it forms a critical part of health care. Despite this, the department increased the budget for emergency services by only 4.7% from 2018/19 to the current 2019 /20 budget.

The Department did, however, see it fit to increase its entertainment budget while our clinics and hospitals are dealing with filthy and dilapidated infrastructure, and are short-staffed and short on medication. The young, the elderly and the disabled are subjected

to hours and hours of waiting. The poor and vulnerable are treated like lepers by this government.

How is it that Primary Health Care services are receiving the smallest budget allocation of R221.8 million, which is less than 1% (0.4 %) of the Department's budget. It is understood that the bulk of the budgets are transferred to provinces, where these horror stories stem from. Minister, what are you going to do about this?

Despite huge budgets, only 60 odd percent of targets are met, at whose expense?

Then, chairperson there is the NHI. The ANC government is putting the cart before the horse, as Cabinet yesterday announced it approved the disastrous NHI. They are wanting to drive through a problematic piece of legislation in the name of achieving universal healthcare. In reality, without the investment in primary healthcare, we will never improve the lives of our people.

We want universal healthcare for our people, but we do not want a piece of legislation that will destroy the health system as we know it.

Thank you.