

Why public hospitals are losing the health battle

Written by Mariska Morris

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Despite both public and private hospitals being required to conform to the National Core Standards and needing to be audited, private hospitals seem to continually outperform public hospitals. MARISKA MORRIS finds out why

The majority of South Africans depend on the public healthcare sector. However, the service provided by public hospitals seems to be lacking compared to private hospitals, especially regarding cleanliness, even though both private and public hospitals need to comply with the same standards.

The government spends more than eight percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) on health, which is more than the five percent recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO). The health department was allocated R38,5 billion for 2016/17 and R145 billion in 2014/15.

According to a paper written by Dr Marjorie Jobson, and published by the Khulumani Support Group in 2015, private hospitals spend around R120 billion annually, which is supplied from the more than 110 registered medical schemes and 3,4-million principal members.

All healthcare facilities need to comply with the National Core Standards, the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Amendment Act of 1993, as well as the National Health Amendment Act 12 of 2013.



There are bodies that audit both private and public health facilities. The Office of Health Standards Compliance (OHSC) is responsible for auditing public hospitals throughout South

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Africa to determine their compliance with the National Core Standards.

Many private hospitals are audited by companies such as the Council for Health Service Accreditation of Southern Africa (COHSASA) – a non-profit organisation that assists a wide range of healthcare facilities in Africa, including private hospitals in South Africa, to meet and maintain quality standards. COHSASA is the only African health facility accredited by the International Society for Quality in Health Care.

Despite this, the OHSC's 2015/16 National Core Standards Inspectorate Annual Report found that (among other things) cleanliness is a big concern in public hospitals. The OHSC inspected health establishments across all nine provinces including four central hospitals, 11 provincial tertiary hospitals, nine regional hospitals, 27 district hospitals and 567 clinics for its report.

“Of major concern is the basic cleanliness of hospitals, which does not cover only the physical cleanliness, but also the availability of cleaning materials. Not a single central hospital scored above 70 percent,” the report states. Cleanliness in hospitals and clinics is especially important as a dirty environment could lead to the spread of disease and infections.

The worst-performing central hospital, among those that were reviewed, was the Dr George Mukhani Hospital in Pretoria near the township of Ga-Rankuwa, which only scored 47 percent in cleanliness.

Provincial tertiary hospitals were also plagued by poor cleanliness. Pelonomi Academic Hospital in Bloemfontein scored only 34 percent in cleanliness, followed by Dihlabeng Hospital with 38 percent.

Clinics in Limpopo scored a shocking 28 percent in the overall clinics score by province with Eastern Cape clinics scoring 30 percent. Gauteng was the only province to score more than 50 percent for the cleanliness of its clinics, at 55 percent.

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