

## NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

### FOR WRITTEN REPLY

#### QUESTION NO. 548

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#### Dr A Lotriet (DA) to ask the Minister of Health:

On what date did he gain knowledge of the (a) transfer of thousands of mentally-ill patients from Life Esidimeni Healthcare to 27 unlicensed non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and (b) persons who had died in the care of these unlicensed NGOs?

NW605E

#### REPLY:

In the whole Life Esidimeni saga, there are different events and various facts that occurred and emerged and were learnt of at different times respectively.

Unfortunately, the honourable member's question is framed in such a way that it assumes that the events and the facts that subsequently emerged all occurred at the same time and hence were learnt of at the same time.

I will try my best to separate them because that is how in reality they occurred.

I first learnt of the intention of Gauteng Department of Health to terminate their contract with Life Esidimeni and move mentally ill patients to other facilities in November 2015, when section 27, on behalf of South African depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG), wrote to the National Department of Health, threatening to take the Gauteng Department of Health to court. They said they will cite the Minister and the Premier of Gauteng though no relief will be sort from them.

The Director-General of the National Department of Health then contacted Gauteng to try and find out what this is all about as nobody in Gauteng Government ever informed the National Department of Health of any problem pertaining to mental health patients.

After being briefed, the Director-General felt that there is nothing that should provoke a court case and that the issues relating to mental health patients are straight forward and can be settled through a discussion.

The Director-General then facilitated a meeting between the HOD of Gauteng Department of Health, SADAG and Section 27. This meeting culminated into an agreement being signed between Gauteng Department of Health and SADAG whereby it was agreed that if patients have to be moved, they will be moved to facilities that do not offer an inferior service to which they were receiving at Life Esidimeni.

As it emerged later, Gauteng Department of Health unfortunately breached this agreement in every conceivable manner!

Part of the agreement was also that a detailed plan be prepared by the parties (Gauteng Department of Health, SADAG, Section 27) by the end of January 2016.

This agreement was an out of court settlement and hence SADAG withdrew its court case, which was due in court on 22 December 2015. The withdrawal happened on 21 December 2015.

It emerged later that Gauteng Department of Health did not put up a plan by the end of January 2016 as agreed in the out of court settlement.

In March 2016, Section 27 then rushed to court to interdict the Gauteng Department of Health but did not cite the Premier or the National Minister of Health, and hence there was no information forthcoming to the National Department in this regard.

Unfortunately, Section 27 lost the court interdict.

I then came to hear about the death of psychiatric patients who were moved from Life Esidimeni when the MEC for Health in Gauteng, in answering to a question in the legislature, announced that 36 mentally-ill patients died under the care of NGO's in and around Gauteng.

I was completely shocked and could not comprehend the whole thing. I immediately contacted the Health Ombuds person, Prof. Malegapuru Makgoba to investigate.

I subsequently learnt from his report that it was actually 94+ patients who died and not the 36 as earlier announced by the MEC in the Legislature. I also learnt from the Ombud's report that when they died they were under the care of 27 NGO's and that the NGO's were actually having invalid licenses issued by the Gauteng Department of Health. All these facts I only learnt when the Health Ombud presented to me a preliminary report in January 2017.

The MEC for Health in Gauteng had made her announcement in the legislature in September 2016 and the Health Ombud was asked by me to investigate in October 2016. The Health Ombud's final report was only released publicly on 01 February 2017.

END.