

Are South Africa's "hospitals of horror" prepared to deal with Coronavirus outbreak?

Lindy Wilson MP - DA Shadow Deputy Minister of Health

Thank you,

Tito Mboweni must be so pleased that his friend, Aloe Ferox, is so hardy and can overcome many hardships. He must be happier that little Ferox is not reliant on the South African Public Health System for survival, especially now that the Coronavirus has hit our shores.

The Minister advised that 13 hospitals have been identified to handle the treatment and quarantine of patients diagnosed with the Coronavirus. Chair, today we speak for all South Africans, and you will understand we are wary.

The Minister was not present at the NHI public hearings to witness the stories that we were told. We were asked to please visit the, and I quote, "hospital of horrors" or the "hospital of death".

Over the last year, we have visited many hospitals across South Africa. What we have witnessed in the vast majority has been disturbing.

In Mafikeng, maternity patients with newborns were sleeping on the floor on mattresses. Medical waste, gloves and vials lying in open areas, and mould growing on the walls. The boiler was not working, and there was no hot water. There was a severe shortage of doctors and nurses. The toilets were filthy with no soap, no towels. An outbreak there would be devastating.

In the Mankweng hospital, more recently, I found much of the same but with animal faeces in the hospital. I could not fathom it, until one evening I found goats wandering through the hospital. I have the pictures.

10 babies died in Tembisa over 2 months. A drug-resistant bacteria has been blamed. If we cannot prevent such deaths over 2 months, how will we manage and control the hundreds of patients who will contract Coronavirus? It is coming.

Coronavirus targets those with vulnerable immune systems and we have the highest numbers of HIV and TB patients in the world. Our national health laboratories don't have the best track record and we are doubtful that they will cope when the numbers of patients escalate.

It is time for transparency Minister. Now that the first case of Coronavirus has been confirmed, we need to know and must see where our patients will be going and confirm that indeed we are ready. It is time to work together and ensure the safety of every South African. Assure us.