

## **No accountability in the Department of Health**

**By Michele Clarke, DA Shadow Minister of Health**

Honourable Speaker,

From what we've heard and will hear here today, you'd swear that South Africa would be the best run country in the world – a utopia for everyone that calls it home. Given all the members' strong stances against corruption, their adamant assurances that it would be cut out root and stem, there should have been no need for this debate.

But as always when dealing with the ANC government, the reality on the ground contradicts their pretty speeches filled with empty promises.

For the millions of people forced to rely on the public health sector, their illnesses are merely the start of their problems. After queueing for hours, they are usually faced with health care personnel that are overworked and underpaid in clinics and hospitals with unmaintained and crumbling infrastructure.

Many public health facilities do not have the necessary equipment, or have equipment that's been broken for months or years. They do not have enough beds, medicine and sometimes-even food.

And why is this? Because in their infinite wisdom, the ANC government decided that expertise would always play second fiddle to cadre deployment.

The public health sector has suffered immensely under mismanagement, corruption and incompetence. And while this has been detrimental to the public at large, it has been hugely beneficial to the pockets of corrupt cadres and their politically connected comrades.

While 80% of South Africans continue to be victims of a public health system that often perpetuates their suffering instead of alleviating it, those corrupt crooks are living it up in luxury and can afford private health care with their stolen billions. Even Deputy President David Mabuza refused to be treated in South Africa, and flew to Russia for health care. Is it any wonder that medico-legal claims have grown 23% since 2014 and that R6.5 billion was awarded in the last year alone.

And while the rapid rise must certainly be investigated to root out corruption there, many of these claims could have been avoided with a healthy public health sector.

The Auditor-General's report revealed irregular expenditure of R1.3 billion – an increase of 42% since last year. Surely those responsible would have been held to account – given the many impassioned words spoken against such mismanagement and corruption today. Let me quote the AG, *"There seem to be no accountability in the department regarding consequence management."*

No accountability. And there hasn't been for years.

You know who have suffered consequences though – whistleblowers like Babita Deokaran and Dr Tim De Maayer. Babita Deokaran exposed corruption of R850 million, and while she was murdered for her efforts, those responsible for the corruption that led to her death have yet to face the music.

There will hardly be a member that comes up who won't mention the tragedy and decry the circumstances that led to it. But empty platitudes will not bring her back, and it certainly won't protect the next whistleblower.

Last week during the oral questions session in Parliament, the Deputy Minister for Health announced a collaboration with the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to establish a policy or plan to protect whistleblowers and assess and mitigate risks in the public health sector procurement systems. Yet details around this collaboration is scant, and without them, this could easily become another brilliant plan that will never be implemented.

If the ANC government was serious about rooting out corruption, it would dismantle the system that has allowed – and continues to allow it to flourish. And while Cabinet's quiet abolishment of cadre deployment is a step in the right direction, corruption will continue to thrive in an environment where consequence management is never taken seriously.

Unless inept and uncaring managers are replaced with competent personnel who take procurement and SCM regulations seriously, and unless every individual involved with corruption face the consequences of their actions, the public health sector will continue its perpetual decline.

South Africa needs to punish those that murder and kill – whether they riddle whistleblowers with bullets or hollow-out a health system through corruption to such an extent that quality health care seems an impossibility.

Unless consequence management is finally taken seriously, our public health system is doomed. And the NHI won't save it. And the next miracle cure the ANC will tout after the NHI's inevitable failure won't cure it. And South Africa's health care problems will continue to multiply.

The answer isn't glamorous. It's not the NHI Bill. It's certainly not the ANC. It IS hard work. It's integrity. It's fearlessness.