

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

FOR WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION NO. 3711

DATE OF PUBLICATION IN INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 21 OCTOBER 2022
(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 40)

Ms H Ismail (DA) to ask the Minister of Health:

- (1) What programmes and processes have been put in place to ensure (a) the safety of the students in Cuba, (b) that they are not living in poor conditions, (c) that their mental health is prioritised and (d) that they are supported to study a very demanding course in a foreign language since the inception of the Nelson Mandela Fidel Castro Medical Collaboration programme;
- (2) (a) what does a bursary contract for the programme entail, (b) under what conditions can it be declared null and void and (c) what are the repercussions of declaring the bursary null and void for (i) the students and (ii) his department?

NW4432E

REPLY:

- (1) (a) Before students leave for Cuba, they get orientation about their stay and study in Cuba and the socioeconomic status in Cuba and some of the strengths of the medical training, this includes safety measures, living conditions. Upon arrival in Cuba, the Cuban authorities also orientate them about safety issues.
- (b) Students from South Africa receive 200 USD per month to supplement their needs over and above what they are provided for by the Universities in Cuba. South African students are also provided with additional essential items when a need arise, an example is during the COVID-19 pandemic. The latest consignment was sent in June 2022 to alleviate challenges their challenges in Cuba.
- (c) There are three support levels for students, from time to time, delegations from Provincial Health Departments including the MECs and Deputy Minister of Health, visit Cuba, and travel to various Provinces in Cuba to meet with the students. Where there is tragedy such as death of a student, or next of kin, Psychologist and/Psychiatrist are sent to Cuba where there are emergencies. All Provinces also provide online counselling of students from time to time. The Cuban authorities also provide psychological and psychiatric treatment for students, however where there is real need for students to come back home for further treatment, students are accompanied back home to receive that treatment.
- (d) The following structures were also established to provide a support mechanism for integration of students from Cuba, these are:
 - i. **The Ministerial task Team (MTT)**

The MTT is comprised of Deans of Medical Schools/Health Sciences Faculties or their representatives, representatives from National Treasury and National Department of Higher Education and Technology. In developing an effective strategy for integration of large groups, the Minister of Health appointed the MTT whose terms of reference are:

- To co-ordinate and facilitate the process of engagement with all stakeholders in order
- To develop comprehensive and detailed implementation plans for each province and associated university in order to ensure the successful re-integration of the students in the expanded Nelson Mandela-Fidel Castro Medical Collaboration Programme into the final year undergraduate medical programme.
- To provide oversight, monitoring, evaluation and support to Provinces and Universities to ensure that deadlines as determined within these implementation plans are adhered to and met.
- To develop and implement a Primary Health approach to undergraduate medical training and to ensure the transformation of undergraduate medical training to incorporate some of the strengths of the Cuban model of training.
- To provide oversight to the process to ensure that quality standards as required by the HPCSA as well as the Ministry of Public Health of Cuba are met.
- Facilitate communication and coordination between all stakeholders to overcome challenges and hurdles.

The MTT has a subcommittee Academic Review Committee (ARC) that:

- focuses on Academic performance of students in all the Medical Schools/Health Sciences Faculties where they are allocated on their return.
- All Universities participating in the Programme have appointed Academic Coordinators who are responsible for the day-to-day management of the programme.
- These coordinators also monitor academic performance of the students including clinical practice and provide interventions at an operational level in terms of academic progress of students.

The Academic Coordinators have a direct link with the Academic Review Committee (ARC) which focuses on the Academic performance of the students in South Africa relation to:

- students who are not progressing well and recommend remedial programmes
- monitor progress of all students in the different levels in Cuba
- Request for regular reports on students from all Universities

- Advocate for issues of standardization amongst participating universities
- Advocate for curriculum review, changes with focus on PHC & District Health Care through the Curriculum Subcommittee amongst others.

ii. **Joint Academic meeting (JAM)**

The JAM is an Academic structure is comprised of the Deans of Medical Schools/Health Science Faculties responsible for Medical Education in South Africa and the Medical Education University Deans in Cuba. It was established in 2010. Its function among others is to:

- conduct of oversight in relation academic teaching, training, and learning including discussion around curriculum development and alignment to prepare the students when they return in South Africa.
- share of experiences between the two countries in terms of academic performances of students but also looking at areas that need improvement.
- monitor performance of students when they are in Cuba and their performance in South Africa after their return.
- share and align policies, procedures applied in Cuba and where there is a need for alignment of review in the pursuit for academic excellence including good clinical practice amongst others.
- The JAM is held annually alternating between the two countries. The first JAM was held in Cuba in 2010 followed by the second in Durban 2011 and the in 2019 at Walter Sisulu University from the 3 to 4 July University. The JAM was supposed to be held in CUBA in 2020 but could not materialize due to COVID-19, however it was held in Cuba from the 23 to the 24 October in 2022.

iii. **South African Committee of Medical Deans (SACOMD)**

This structure has been existing however in terms of the integration Programme the NMFC Programme is also discussed at meetings of SACOMD some of which relates to:

- Expansion of the training platform for the re-integration process and future expansion.
- Move towards Primary Health Care approach in teaching and training.
- identify the requirements to expand the training platform.
- Collaborates with Department of Health to monitor Memorandum of Agreements (MOU) signed between Universities and the Department of Health.

- (2) (a) The bursary contract elements are standard for all bursaries for the Department of Health. In terms of the Nelson Mandela Fidel Castro Collaboration additional elements are added in the bursary contract:
- ✓ running costs such as, return air tickets twice (during second and fourth year) during their training in Cuba for vacations in South Africa,
 - ✓ transportation costs for bereavement in SA (for close family members only), this is restricted to "immediate family member" referred to the parents/ legal guardian(s), brother(s); sister(s) and spouse of the bursar,
 - ✓ stipend whilst in Cuba, expended by the Department on behalf of the bursar
 - ✓ the bursar will be allocated to an authorised medical university on return to South Africa to complete his or her medical degree;
- ✓ the bursar will complete his/her study at the University of the Republic of Cuba for the first six years of the course, and a designated university in South Africa for the final year of the course.
- (b) The only condition where the bursary can be declared null, and void is when it is a fraudulent document.
- (c) (i) If it is a fraudulent document, it should be terminated when this is known and confirmed and
- (ii) the student might be liable for paying back the money or legal action will be taken against the student

END.