



SAMA MEDIA STATEMENT – HOSPITAL EQUIPMENT BREAKDOWNS

22 JANUARY 2023

The South African Medical Association (SAMA) regrettably reports the temporary closure of Orthopaedics unit at Ngwelezana Hospital in KZN due to equipment breakdowns at the said facility. This closure impacts on average 70 operations per week - such as Trauma, Spine, Arthroplasty, Deformity correction, Sepsis and Paediatric Orthopaedics.

It is not only Orthopaedic equipment that has broken down at Ngwelezana Hospital (a tertiary hospital), but it is reported that radiography equipment in theatre keeps breaking or has not been functioning since November 2022. The aircon in theatre is critical for many operations and it is reported that the AC is at most non-functional. The operating environment is dire with flies landing on open arthroplasty wounds due to non-functioning theatre doors. Management have been consistently informed of equipment breakdowns and stock shortages with no resolution from them. It is an abhorrent environment for our members to continue to operate in. Our members were informed that this temporary situation is estimated to last until March/April 2023, however there is little hope that this will be the case.

SAMA received reports that equipment breakdowns are happening in other hospitals in KZN and across the country. Elective surgery backlogs currently stand at 175 024¹. The breakdown by province is: Western Cape ranked at number one with 77,139; Limpopo is at 45,690, followed by KwaZulu-Natal has 17,903. The Free State has the lowest at 2,947, Mpumalanga has 3,005 and the Northern Cape 4,000.

The COVID-19 pandemic influence on the backlog is one of the primary reasons for such a high number. The contingency plans were to reschedule non-emergency operations, theatre services being provided over weekends and extended theatre hours. However, this is impossible if there are equipment breakdowns, maintenance issues and the general lack of infrastructure. Loadshedding adds another variable in that power surges are affecting medical equipment; some of the equipment do not have enough battery power to sustain operations during the higher stages of loadshedding.

The last Medium Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS) did not seem to recognise the importance of prioritising healthcare funding. The lack of functional management at the public healthcare facilities is robbing our people a chance in life.

¹ <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2022-09-28-sa-hospitals-have-a-backlog-of-175024-elective-surgeries/>

It is SAMA's position that the public healthcare system must be declared a state of emergency so that people's lives can be saved.

[ENDS]

Notes to Editors

About SAMA: The South African Medical Association ("SAMA") was established in 1927 and became known as it is today through the unification of a variety of doctors' groups on 21 May 1998 that had represented a diversity of interests. SAMA is a non-statutory, professional association for public and private sector medical practitioners. SAMA is registered a non-profit company in terms of the Companies Act. SAMA is a voluntary membership association, existing to serve the best interests and needs of its members in any and all healthcare-related matters.

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