

# SAMA MEDIA STATEMENT



## SAMA CONDEMNS RISING CRIME TARGETING HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

Pretoria, 19 August 2024

The South African Medical Association (SAMA) is deeply alarmed by the recent closure of an ophthalmology practice in Mthatha, Eastern Cape due to criminal activities. This incident, which appears to have specifically targeted healthcare professionals, underscores the growing and unacceptable threats faced by our members across the country.

SAMA unequivocally condemns the escalating acts of violence against medical practitioners and other healthcare workers. The impact of such criminal activities on the healthcare sector is severe and far-reaching. High levels of violence and crime in healthcare settings not only deter individuals from pursuing careers in this essential field but also compel current healthcare workers to leave their posts. This exacerbates existing workforce shortages, leading to overstressed facilities and compromised patient care.

As victims of these crimes, healthcare workers suffer from physical injuries, psychological trauma, and emotional distress, with some incidents tragically resulting in death. These attacks contribute to burnout, reduced productivity, impaired decision-making, and mental health issues, all of which significantly affect their ability to provide quality care. Moreover, patients—who are often in vulnerable states—are also being caught up in these criminal acts, facing personal attacks and robbery within facilities that should serve as sanctuaries for healing and recovery.

SAMA has received numerous reports from our members in the East London area, and we have formally raised these concerns with the local Commissioner of Police, who has engaged the organisation on this matter. Furthermore, we escalated this matter to national leaders - Police Minister Cele and Police Minister Mchunu. The current Minister of Police was engaged on the 14 August 2024 regarding safety and security in Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga hospitals. Regrettably, there has been no response from these ministries to date.

In 2022, SAMA commissioned a scoping review study to examine the violence against healthcare workers in South Africa from 2012 to 2022, focusing on doctors, nurses, and paramedics. The study highlighted alarming levels of non-fatal violence, including incidents of kicking, swearing, hijacking, armed robbery, and attempted sexual assault.

SAMA is committed to working with provincial authorities to improve security management at healthcare facilities. However, we strongly urge the development and implementation of a comprehensive, multi-sectorial strategy to protect healthcare workers from targeted crime. Without urgent intervention, the healthcare sector will continue to be undermined, and more doctors will feel compelled to seek safer environments abroad, taking with them the critical skills and expertise that are desperately needed in South Africa.

(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 all healthcare-related matters.

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