



FOR PROFESSIONALS

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EDUCATION AND TRAINING THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE - SA DOCTOR SURVEY

03 December 2013: Insufficient education and training have been highlighted as two of the biggest challenges facing the medical profession, according to a recent PPS survey conducted among over 600 South African medical doctors. The survey revealed that 33% of respondents believe more training is needed within the profession.

According to Gerhard Joubert, Head of Group Marketing and Stakeholder Relations at PPS, these statistics highlight a major concern for the medical profession. "Reducing the shortages of trained medical professionals is a big priority for the Department of Health (DoH). Based on the survey results, however, 52% of the respondents felt that the current training standards for medical students are not adequate for what is needed within the South African healthcare system."

The respondents also highlighted their concern over the lack of mathematics and science graduates in South Africa, with 95% indicating that this was an issue.

Dr Mark Sonderup, Vice-Chairman of the South African Medical Association (SAMA), says that the number of graduates that the country needs to produce, and its limited capacity to do so, is a significant challenge for South Africa. "If teaching and training resources are not increased according to what is required, then the first casualty of simply increasing numbers, will be quality."

Chris Fourie, National Coordinator at the South Africa Medical Students Association (SAMSA), agrees with Dr Sonderup saying that the lecture halls at medical universities are bursting with medical students, which vastly decreases the quality of training received. "This problem is further compounded when medical students leave the universities to attend bedside clinical teaching. To have 10-12 students being instructed by a single consultant around an already uncomfortable patient in a public hospital can also bring the quality of education down."

In July this year, the DoH came under heavy criticism from the medical fraternity for the South African-Cuban doctor programme, with many indicating that the doctors trained in the programme were not adequately equipped to enter the country's healthcare system.

When questioned on National Health Insurance (NHI), 65% of respondents supported the principle of Universal Healthcare (UHC), which underpins the proposed healthcare model. However, 54% of the respondents were not prepared to contract out to government to work part-time at rural public health facilities that were part of the NHI pilot project. Concerns over the implementation of and buy-into NHI were cited as one of the possible reasons for this.

Joubert points out that a cohesive approach needs to be taken with NHI, where the private healthcare sector expertise and skills are utilised to realise the policy of government. “This requires total buy-in from medical professionals in order for it to be successful.”

Respondents also indicated that only 1% of the challenges they face within their profession are related to hygiene, health and safety standards. Dr Sonderup believes that this could be as a result of an increased number of surveillance programs for example antibiotic use and resistant bacteria in both the public and private sectors.

Joubert says the survey conducted with the medical professionals revealed some interesting areas where improvement is needed within the healthcare sector. “In order to ensure the sustainability of the profession, the government and private sector need to work together to find solutions for the challenges faced.”

Joubert notes that it is positive that a confidence level of 72% was recorded when the respondents were asked about their confidence in the future of their profession over the next five years. “In addition to this, 75% of respondents are confident about remaining in South Africa for foreseeable future, which is encouraging given the vital skills medical professionals provide to the country.”