



FOR PROFESSIONALS

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SA DENTISTS' CONFIDENCE IN THE HEALTHCARE ENVIRONMENT REMAIN LOW - SURVEY

South African dentists remain concerned about the inclusion of cover for dental benefits in medical schemes, according to a new survey conducted by PPS. The survey of more than 150 South African dentists found that only 11% of respondents believed that medical schemes provided adequately for oral health.

In addition, it is worrying to note that dentists' concerns about the implementation of the National Health Insurance (NHI) initiative continues to grow. Only 10% of respondents indicated that they are confident that NHI is the correct solution to fix the country's ailing health system, down 1% from the previous survey.

There was also a drop in confidence regarding the future of the health care system over the five years, which fell 1 percentage point to 39%.

According to Gerhard Joubert, Head of Group Marketing and Stakeholder Relations at PPS, the financial services provider focused on graduate professionals, it is concerning that confidence levels across a number of key metrics remain extremely low. "Dentists are a crucial component of the medical industry in South Africa so it is vital that they feel included within the many changes currently taking place within the medical and healthcare space."

Maretha Smit, Chief Executive Officer at the South African Dental Association, said that the low levels of confidence of dentists are of major concern. "In a country, where our health outcomes are so poor, despite the high percentage of GDP allocated to health, we need to focus our attention to prevention and primary care. Very few patients understand the limitations of dental cover through their Medical Aid Schemes, or the fact that scheme rates offered to dentists, in many instances, fall way below the actual costs of treatment and service. The inadequacy of current funding models to provide sufficiently for dental care could ultimately lead to the demise of the profession."

Statistics released by the Government Employees Medical Schemes recently revealed that 41% of women and 31% of men suffer from oral disease in South Africa, with 64% of women and 56% of men having lost some of their teeth. "These alarmingly high statistics reveal the dire need for the dental profession to be included within any new healthcare structures that are being proposed by government."

Joubert notes that a number of other statistics in the survey also reveal urgent concerns that must be addressed in the near term. "The survey showed that only 24% of dentists would encourage their children to enter their profession. This is extremely concerning as we already facing a huge shortage of dentists in South Africa and our current dentists should be acting as ambassadors for their profession. The fact that they would not want their children to follow in their footsteps speaks volumes about how they currently view the opportunities available in their profession."

Also concerning was a 4 percentage point decrease to 73% when asked whether they will remain in South Africa for the foreseeable future. This finding is worrisome when paired with recent data released by the Pondering Panda survey which revealed that the overall number of youths between the ages of 18 - 34 wanting to emigrate increased from 25% to 36% over a period of three months.

“The fact that we are seeing the youth in South Africa increasingly looking to emigrate, combined with the fact that dentists would not encourage others to enter the profession, is a hugely worrying combination,” says Joubert.

Elsewhere, confidence in whether the withdrawal of a National Health Reference Price List (NHRPL) approach - the basis upon which medical scheme rates were previously based but was withdrawn in 2010 resulting in medical schemes now setting their own rates by adjusting previous tariff lists for inflation - is beneficial to the dental and oral health professions, was down one percentage point to 52%.

It is promising to note that local dentists' confidence in the future of the standard of education improved by three percentage points to 45%, however concern over the rising cost of tertiary education increased by five percentage points to 97%. Dentists' confidence levels regarding crime rates remained unchanged at 37%, while a two percentage point drop in confidence to 35% about unemployment improving was noted.

“The third quarter survey among dentists has revealed that they remain worried about a number of issues in the healthcare industry, which is impacting their confidence of remaining in the country. It is crucial these concerns are addressed in order to ensure the longevity of the oral health industry,” conclude Joubert.

Other results from the dental professional survey:

- Confidence in the future of their profession remained unchanged at 64%
- Confidence in their ability to earn an income that keeps up with inflation was down one percentage point to 53%
- Confidence in the economic outlook for South Africa over the next 12 months was down five percentage points to 51%
- Confidence in the outlook for local equity / share markets was down two percentage point to 58%
- Confidence that South Africa has seen the worst of the global economic turmoil was up three percentage points to 49%
- Confidence that they have saved enough to retire was down one percentage point to 54%