



FOR PROFESSIONALS

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SURVEY OF SA DOCTORS REVEAL CONCERNS OVER STAFFING SHORTAGES AND RESTRICTIONS OF PMBs

02 October 2013: A PPS survey conducted among South African doctors has revealed that their primary concerns are staffing levels at hospitals as well as the restrictions of Prescribed Minimum Benefits (PMB) by medical schemes. However, respondents are optimistic about their involvement in the National Health Initiative (NHI).

The survey of almost 400 medical professional doctors found that 37% of respondents believe that staffing levels are the biggest problems hindering the local medical profession.

According to Gerhard Joubert, Head of Group Marketing and Stakeholder Relations at PPS, the result is not surprising, with shortages at hospitals across the country well documented.

Dr Mzukisi Grootboom, -Chairman of the South African Medical Association, agrees with this sentiment saying that staffing levels in some provinces, particularly the Eastern Cape and Limpopo, are a growing challenge, with the situation becoming dire in certain areas.

However, medical scheme issues are also impacting the industry with the survey revealing that only 26% of local doctors feel that the current list of PMBs is sufficient.

It will never be sufficient as schemes always challenge any attempt by the Council for Medical Schemes (CMS) to make the list broader to cover more conditions, says Dr Grootboom. "Strictly speaking, only cosmetic treatment should be excluded. In addition, most PMB's are "hospital based" conditions and hence outpatient general practice type situations are wholly excluded."

On a more positive note, 52% of respondents indicated they would be prepared to enter into an agreement with the Department of Health to work part-time (for payment) at rural health facilities or so called NHI pilot sites.

Joubert notes that this is incredibly positive as past surveys conducted among medical professionals by PPS have shown some hesitance with the principle behind of NHI. "A year ago, only 59% of respondents were confident in the principle of NHI. This figure is now up seven percentage points to 66%."

Dr Grootboom says doctors should be encouraged to participate in the NHI pilots, but they should not be enslaved. "There still needs to be a clear contract that will detail what they are expected to do and how they will be remunerated. Part of the remuneration must consider the fact that when doctors or General Practitioners (GPs) leave their practices, their expenses on the practice (such as salaries to staff, utilities etc.) continue to be incurred, hence the remuneration

must not only look at the professional fee, but must include compensation to cover some of those costs. Ideally, the patients on the NHI should be visiting GPs at their practices, but we understand that those systems have not been setup yet.”

Joubert says the survey conducted among medical professionals revealed some interesting areas of concern for this important group. “It is vital that steps are taken to address these concerns in order to attract and retain these vital professionals in South Africa.”