

Spotlight on the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital Imbizo

The NALEDI Hospitals Project has been working with trade unions, management, the hospital board, doctors and nurses to transform Chris Hani Baragwanath hospital for over five years. Last year the hospitals project identified issues faced by the public hospitals more broadly and made recommendations which were tabled to the Cabinet lekgotla in January.

On Monday 26th May 2006 the minister of Public Service and Administration, Geraldine Fraser Moleketi addressed a public imbizo attended by health stakeholders and union member at the Chris Hani Baragwanath hospital. The National Education Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU) organized a protest in support of the initiative to transform Chris Hani Baragwanath hospital and to better working conditions at the hospital.

During her address to the imbizo, Minister Fraser Moleketi acknowledged that the Chris Hani Baragwanath hospital is a highly stressed institution. She welcomed recommendations made by NALEDI and warmly congratulated the NALEDI team for research which was "frank and honest, identifying institutional stress, workloads and managerial disempowerment as key factors." .

The NALEDI report criticized government for employing too few nurses and reducing the number of support workers, which increases the work of already overloaded nurses. SCHB is between 30 - 40% short of nurses. Staff shortages have resulted in public institutions such as Chris Hani Baragwanath becoming paralyzed. Under these conditions the batho pele (putting people first) concept, an initiative by government aimed to enhance the quality and accessibility of government services by improving efficiency and accountability to the recipients of public goods and services, seems impossible to achieve.

The recommendations made in the NALEDI Hospitals Project research include the reopening of nurses training college, employing more staff, especially less skilled nurses and support workers, and that Hospital managers should be granted full authority, and be held fully accountable for managing their hospitals without interference from head offices, according to agreed budget, business plan and performance.



To these issues the minister responded that government is looking into ways of retaining current health care workers and are planning to reopen training nursing college to increase the number of skilled health care personnel. This plan is aimed at

national level. She also noted that the hospital managers will be granted autonomous managerial power and they will be accountable for every decision they make.

NEHAWU's Johannesburg chairperson, Clement Marule raised concerns that the project has been going on for over five years with very little headway. He cited this to lack of political commitment and indicated that health care professional's salaries and working conditions need to be enhanced in order to retain them as it has been done with Social workers.

In response, the Minister stated that the NALEDI recommendations had been endorsed at the highest level, by the President, and therefore government has no option but to implement them.

NALEDI's senior researcher, Karl von Holdt who has led the research team says that the ball is now in government's court. Research has been done, issues have been identified and recommendations made. There needs to be political will and commitment to ensure that all decisions made are implemented.

In general nurses, doctors, cleaners and managers see the project to transform Chris Hani Baragwanath as a viable vehicle that will bring about change to the hospital and improve their working conditions and hopefully make the "batho pele" concept a reality for more than 6 million people catered for by the hospital.

NEHAWU is planning to launch its National service delivery campaign with a march at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital on 24 June. The march will be led by its national leadership, and will focus on supporting the implementation of the Chris Hani Baragwanath transformation project as well as the broader NALEDI recommendations, in addition to other demands. The union is currently discussing this campaign with senior clinicians as well as broader labour, community, church structures in an effort to mobilise the broadest possible support for improving the public health service. All are welcome to join in!

By Lebogangng Marishane