

Minister Motsoaledi announces radical changes to Health infrastructure planning, management and delivery

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“The situation in infrastructure budgeting is as if we have ten countries in one,” said the Minister of Health, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, during a consultation workshop on the rebuilding of five hospitals that are flagship projects; at Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital. “We need to discard what has not worked and cherish what has worked as we built stadia for the FIFA World Cup.”

The Minister is in country wide visits to consult with stakeholders in the building of five major hospitals in the country as announced by the Minister of Finance, Mr. Pravin Gordhan, during the Budget Speech. Accompanying the Minister are officials from the Development Bank of South Africa and officials from the National Department of Health. The hospitals include King Edward VIII, George Mukhari, Walter Sisulu, Chris Hani Baragwanath and Limpopo Academic Hospitals. These hospitals were chosen as flagship projects in fast tracking infrastructure development in public health.

The hospitals were identified because they are providing referral services to mainly rural communities.

“During the development of the Ten Point Programme we identified the acceleration of infrastructure development as one of the key pillars for health transformation as well as in preparation for the implementation of the National Health Insurance (NHI). This was because of an honest introspection that informed us that we have not done much in the past sixteen years. I will tell the facts as though ‘I am dissecting without anaesthesia so that you can feel the pain’” continued the Minister.

The Minister said that the rebuilding of these hospitals will improve the delivery of healthcare and achievement of the better outcomes. He spoke of some of the problems that have given rise to the state of deterioration in some of the state hospitals; and King Edward VIII Hospital in particular. The Minister said that one of the problems is that the department uses doctors to manage infrastructure projects. “This situation is like when we want to revamp our transport system towards airplanes and then take taxi drivers to be pilots.” The Minister reported that the National Health Council (NHC; where the Minister meets his MECs) decided that all infrastructure units must be manned by engineers and he introduced the appointed engineer in the National Department who will lead the projects.

The Minister said that government wants to use the experience gained in the building of FIFA stadiums in the implementation of these projects. He said engineers will not deal with brick and mortar issued but will provide strategic management of these massive projects including developing norms and standards from clinics up to big hospitals. He further announced that the time when departments would give monies to public works without their involvement in planning and design has come to an end. He committed that provinces who under spend would have their infrastructure budget taken away.

This was in view of a report by Dr Moussad Shaker (Engineer) who presented spending trend which shows that provinces have been under spending on their infrastructure budgets in the past five years. “To revitalize public hospitals would take us up to ten years at the least. In the current financial year; R7, 6 billion has been budgeted for revitalization and we project an under spending of around R1, 3 billion if things are allowed to continue as they stand” said Dr Shaker.

The Minister concluded his address by stating that when government resolved to push up education and health; in the development agenda, it did so as a result of a though rough introspection. He said, as far as government is concerned, there is nothing to revitalize at King Edward VIII Hospital as it is. “The fact that we can’t hold a meeting for fifty people is exactly the point” he said.

The meeting ended with a number of task teams being put in place to start working on the project.

The cost of the projects is estimated to be “much more than the building of stadia” according to the Minister.

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