

Joint statement by MEC Dhlomo and management of Durban and Coastal Mental Healthcare Centre

13 July 2018

We hereby wish to register our objection in the strongest possible terms to the blatant and shameless opportunism displayed by DA MPL Dr Imraan Keeka, following an oversight visit to the Durban and Coastal Mental Healthcare (DCMH) in Sherwood, Durban earlier this week.

Following the emergence of allegations that three patients at the facility had been sexually abused in separate incidents since 2016, Dr Keeka made a formal request to the Acting KZN Health Head of Department to perform an oversight visit at the facility. However, he conveniently failed to mention in his request that he would be bringing along with him a media contingent.

After the request had been granted, Dr Keeka went to DCMH with the media in tow. But instead of sharing his findings with the Department like any right-thinking and progressive person would, so that any challenges can be addressed and corrective action taken, he opted to turn the situation into a sensational media circus.

This amounts to an ambush of the unsuspecting management of the facility, as well as the Departments of Health and Social Developments, who effectively run this facility through the funding that they provide.

It is also an affront on to an ongoing investigation process by the police, and the Mental Health Review Board (MHRB), an independent structure, which recently visited the facility, and regularly conducts unannounced oversight visits.

In typical style, towards the end of his visit Dr Keeka went on to falsely claim to management of DCMH that he had been mandated by the KZN MEC for Health to visit the facility. The MEC for Health has a number of people who report to him, but Dr Keeka is not one of them.

Government is extremely sensitive about mental healthcare users, in light of developments that have been seen elsewhere in the country.

Management of the DCMH takes every allegation seriously, and always endeavours to investigate them to the fullest extent possible.

The facility has a 24-hour reporting period of complaints and every allegation is attended to speedily and monitored. Every possible measure is taken to minimise risk and ensure the protection of service users.

In fact, signs that a patient might have been sexually assaulted were first picked up by staff at the facility, and then immediately reported to the police. Other issues that have been raised about the facility are already being closely monitored by the provincial MECs for Health and Social Development respectively, as well as the Heads of Department Dr Musa Gumede (for Health) and Ms Nokuthula Khanyile (Social Development).

But, in his quest to draw attention to himself and his party and claim credit for these interventions, Dr Keeka has sought to hijack the process and blow all matters out of proportion.

He has sought to milk the situation while rubbishing management of the facility by making baseless claims and accusations, even before investigations into this matter have been concluded.

His reckless action have had a detrimental effect on the reputation of all concerned.

Clearly, we are dealing here with an unscrupulous person who is determined to abuse his privileged position as a Member of the Provincial Legislature for nefarious ends. To Dr Keeka, drawing mileage in the media – even from the most unfortunate of situations - trumps everything. Even the truth. What a shame.

We wish to call upon the media to continue playing its important role within a constitutional democracy, which is to hold those in power accountable. But it must also endeavour to exercise and retain its independence, and be cautious and resist the temptation to accept as the gospel truth the mistruths, which usually come from the mouths of seekers of cheap publicity such as Dr Imraan Keeka.