

PMB taxi protest: MEC Dhlomo condemns disruptions to service delivery at Edendale hospital and burning of a government vehicle

25 January 2018

KwaZulu-Natal Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has strongly condemned the burning of a Departmental vehicle and disruptions to healthcare service delivery at Edendale Hospital due to the actions of protesting taxi drivers in Pietermaritzburg earlier today.

In addition to the torching of the vehicle on Langalibalele Street, the protesting taxi drivers blocked access to and from Edendale Hospital – resulting in some patients having to be sent home.

While patients struggled to get to the hospital, some operations had to be cancelled as doctors could not get to work on time.

The protest action had the following impact on operations at Edendale Hospital:

- At the Emergency department, not all staff reported on duty, so green codes (those with non-life threatening ailments) were discharged and asked to return the next day;
- The Urology Clinic cancelled appointments due to unavailability of the doctor;
- At the Orthopaedics unit, most doctors arrived only around midday, and are only doing emergency work. One case was cancelled because the orthopaedic surgeon from Grey's was unable to get through to the hospital.
- The surgical disciplines did not have capacity to run full theatre operation lists.
- While surgical emergencies are carrying on, scheduled surgical operations had to be cancelled
- Patients with Ear, Nose and Throat-related ailments were seen late as the doctor could not get through on time. So did the Ophthalmologist, who might have to cancel a few local cases.
- The Obstetrics unit was only able to run one theatre. A second theatre was only opened just before 1pm.

MEC Dhlomo said: *"What has happened here is completely unacceptable. We cannot afford to have a situation where access to healthcare – including for people in life-threatening situations – can be disrupted by a few people who have grievances. No matter how legitimate these people believe their grievances to be, we cannot have people dying just because of the irresponsible actions of a few. It simply cannot be justified."*

Regarding the burning of a vehicle, we always get complaints that from the communities that we as the Department of Health do not provide them with enough vehicles, including ambulances to service them. If the very few that we have get burnt, it makes the situation even worse. Community concerns, even those of the taxi industry, cannot be solved better by burning or destroying government property that is meant to service the community."

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