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KZN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH HOLDS MAIDEN BILATERAL MEETING WITH SAMATU

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health and the South African Medical Association Trade Union (SAMATU) in KwaZulu-Natal held their maiden bilateral meeting this week following a formal request by SAMATU KZN leadership.

The meeting was attended by the KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Health, Ms Nomagugu Simelane, the Head of Department, HOD Ms Penny Msimango and senior departmental officials, as well as the newly constituted SAMATU KZN leadership.

The purpose of the engagement was twofold; firstly, to introduce the newly elected SAMATU KZN provincial leadership structure, and secondly, to establish a constructive platform that will guide ongoing and future bilateral engagements between the Department and SAMATU.

Both parties acknowledged the importance of open, respectful, and solution-oriented dialogue in strengthening labour relations and advancing healthcare delivery in the province.

The meeting was characterised by robust and frank discussions on several critical issues affecting the health sector. Among the key matters raised was the persistent challenge of unemployed medical doctors, including concerns relating to the upcoming cohort of medical graduates for 2026.

SAMATU expressed its concerns regarding employment opportunities for qualified doctors and the implications for service delivery and professional development.

In response, MEC Simelane provided a comprehensive overview of the Department's current operational and financial constraints. She highlighted the severe budget cuts facing the Department, which have resulted in unfunded and frozen posts across various disciplines.

"If we had our way, we would employ doctors and specialists in large numbers to strengthen our health system. However, the Department is severely constrained by acute budget cuts, which limit our ability to absorb all qualified professionals into the public sector," said MEC Simelane.

The MEC further encouraged unemployed doctors to explore other avenues and opportunities beyond the public sector. She also expressed concern about the

ongoing loss of critical medical skills to the private sector, noting that this trend continues to place significant strain on public healthcare services and the Department's capacity to meet growing healthcare demands.

In the meeting, SAMATU Provincial Chairperson, Dr Mlungisi Mtshali emphasised the union's commitment to ongoing engagement with the Department to address critical service delivery and workforce challenges across KwaZulu-Natal.

The union highlighted its concerns and proposals regarding staffing shortages, working conditions, resource constraints and their impact on patient care. SAMATU further underscored its dedication to working collaboratively with the Department to advance proactive, sustainable solutions that support a resilient and high-performing provincial healthcare system.

"We also appreciate the department's feedback on the finalisation of the 100 doctor posts due to start in January next year," said Mtshali.

Both the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health and SAMATU reaffirmed their commitment to continued engagement and collaboration. The meeting concluded with a shared understanding that sustained dialogue and cooperative problem-solving are essential in addressing the complex challenges facing the health sector, particularly those related to human resources, funding constraints, and service delivery.

The parties agreed that this maiden meeting sets a positive tone for future engagements aimed at improving working conditions for healthcare professionals and strengthening healthcare services for the people of KwaZulu-Natal.

ENDS