



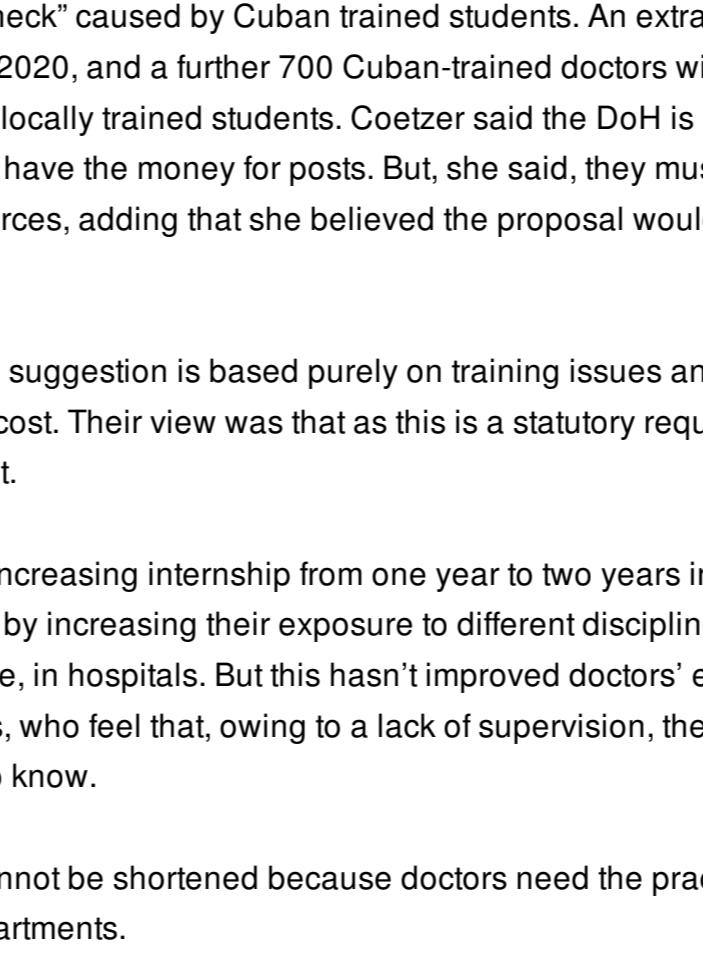
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Food for thought

Doctors' internship system is failing SA



Medical deans have added their voices to suggestions that doctors' internships be reduced from two years to one because the community service and internship programme is "not meeting the country's needs," wrote Katherine Child in *Times Select* on 23 January. This follows reports that almost 200 posts for doctors and specialists remain unfilled at Gauteng's four academic hospitals.

According to Prof Martin Veller of Wits an increase in the number of interns has not improved health and the lengthening of training has not changed any of the health parameters.

SAMA president, Dr Angelique Coetzer, said the Department of Health (DoH) was very keen on cutting internships because of a "bottleneck" caused by Cuban-trained students. An extra 700 Cuban-trained doctors will need internships in 2020, and a further 700 Cuban-trained doctors will need internships in 2021, on top of the 1 200 locally trained students. Coetzer said the DoH is pushing this one-year internship because they don't have the money for posts. But, she said, they must be open and transparent and sort out their resources, adding that she believed the proposal would create inadequately trained doctors.

Veller said the motivation for the deans' suggestion is based purely on training issues and has nothing to do with the issues related to cost. Their view was that as this is a statutory requirement, the state must find the resources to pay for it.

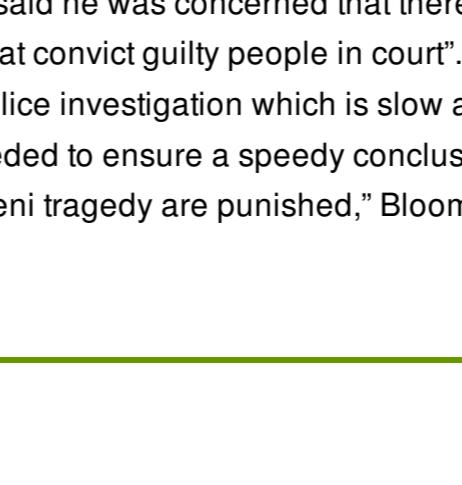
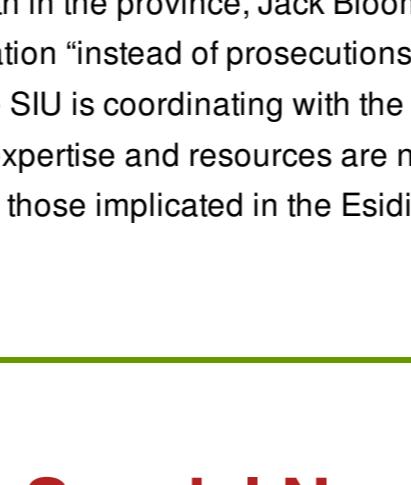
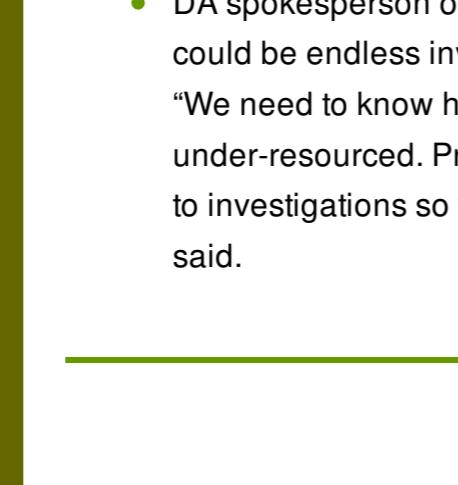
The reasons given for the government increasing internship from one year to two years in 2005 was to improve medical students' education by increasing their exposure to different disciplines, including obstetrics, surgery and internal medicine, in hospitals. But this hasn't improved doctors' education or service delivery, according to the deans, who feel that, owing to a lack of supervision, the internship is not teaching students what they need to know.

Coetzer said the two-year internship cannot be shortened because doctors need the practical skills they learn from working in different departments.

*Trade union Solidarity also welcomed the idea of a shortened internship and suggested that the solution is to accredit private institutions to offer internships.

- [Also read: Medical Brief's article - Special News; and](#)
- ['Are Doctors being picky?' - News from Government](#)

News on Government



HMI drops probes as it runs short of funds

The Competition Commission (CC) has run short of funds and has been forced to scale back on key market inquiries and investigations until the new financial year begins on April 1, reported *Business Day* on 24 January.

The commission appears set to remain within its operational budget after it was censured in 2018 by the auditor-general for exceeding its approved budget by R78.6m and incurring R128.6m in irregular expenditure for the 2017/18 financial year.

The inquiry was established five years ago to probe the private healthcare industry and has so far spent R196m on external consultants alone. It has been repeatedly postponed, partly due to legal challenges, but also because it has been at pains to show it is taking heed of concerns raised by stakeholders at every step of the way.

Following the latest delay in the Health Market Inquiry (HMI), the lobby group Section27 questioned whether the government had the political will to see the HMI through to the end. Executive director, Umuyanda Rugege, said the cost of finalising the work of the inquiry is likely to be a fraction of the potential cost savings from appropriate private healthcare sector reforms. Section27 warned that its delay will have a knock-on effect on reforms that have the potential to make quality healthcare more affordable.

The commission's spokesperson, Sipho Ngwema, said the commission needs to stick to the resources provided by the fiscus. The delay in publishing the inquiry's final report will have an immediate effect on work to reform the Medical Schemes Industry.

Esidimeni tragedy - Stronger leadership and bigger budgets needed

In December 2018 the DoH announced that over 6 000 medical graduates had been successfully placed at health facilities, including for two-year medical internships and the mandatory one year of community service.

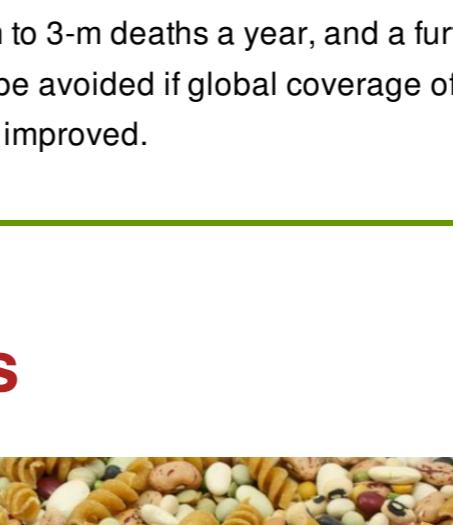
But at least one in 10 of these young health workers appealed their placements, wrote Amy Green on *Health-e-News Service* (22 January).

The majority of these appeals (71%) were against placements in rural and peri-urban areas, precisely where the need is dire.

Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi has previously condemned doctors who reject their posts, calling them "picky" and accusing them of undermining the fundamental concept of the community service year, which is to increase skills and staff in places where state health facilities are in desperate need.

Meanwhile Pres Cyril Ramaphosa has signed an amended proclamation to broaden the terms of reference of the Special Investigating Unit's (SIU) probe into the Life Esidimeni tragedy. "The broadened terms of reference include looking into 28 entities in whose care psychiatric patients were entrusted," said Taseem Motsepe, ANC Gauteng executive committee spokesperson.

- DA spokesperson on health in the province, Jack Bloom, said he was concerned that there could be endless investigation "instead of prosecutions that convict guilty people in court".
- We need to know how the SIU is coordinating with the police investigation which is slow and under-resourced. Proper expertise and resources are needed to ensure a speedy conclusion to investigations so that all those implicated in the Esidimeni tragedy are punished," Bloom said.

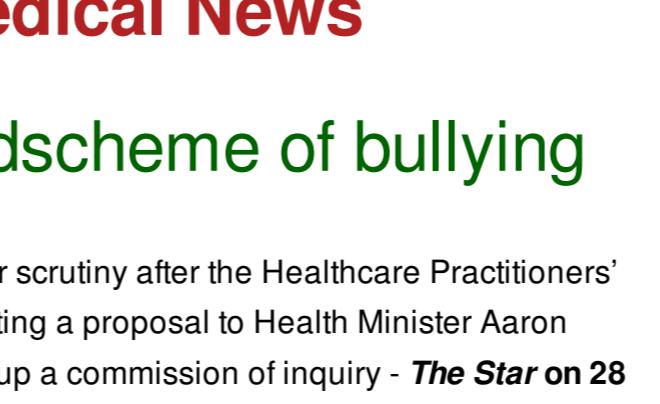


According to the newly-elected president of the SA Society of Psychiatrists (SASOP), Prof Bonga Chiliza, the deaths of 144 patients in the now notorious Life Esidimeni tragedy, and allegations of abuse and human rights violations at the Tower Psychiatric Hospital in the Eastern Cape, pointed to the need for the organisation to rise and answer the call for advocacy on behalf of mental healthcare users and the profession. Chiliza said SASOP would also be doing more to encourage medical students to specialise in psychiatry, in order to grow the number of qualified professionals able to serve public mental healthcare needs.

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Special News

Shorter internships for doctors considered as SA runs out of space



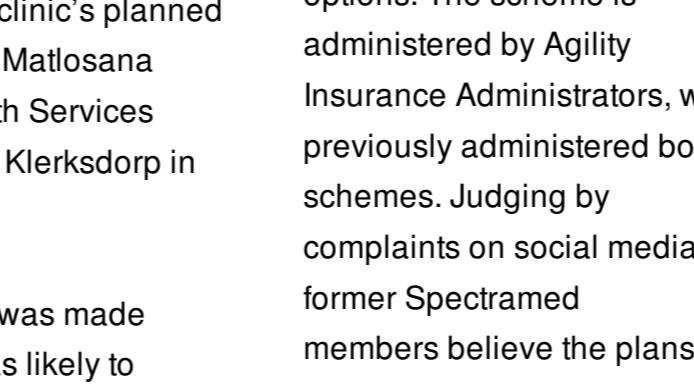
A news app for all medical professionals

While the Department of Health has kept its word in ensuring that all South African born and-trained medical interns and community service doctors are placed this year, concerns are mounting about the country's shortage of accredited facilities to accommodate the increasing number of new medical graduates. The possibility of again shortening internships to one year as it was before 2005 is now being considered as one of the possible solutions to "open up space" to accommodate interns.

Button

View on Financial News

Bill Gates insists world health must top agenda



Gates said in an interview at Davos that it is really the continued willingness of the voters and politicians in the top aid donor countries that will determine if this initiative continues or not.

According to Gates \$10-bn invested over 20 years had generated \$20-bn in economic benefits, while he would have struggled to double the investments had he \$10-bn of his wealth into the S&P 500.

Relative to the benefits, the amounts involved are small for the richer countries, he argued.

Bill Gates, philanthropist, billionaire and founder of the Microsoft technological company, urged governments represented at the recent World Economic Forum in Davos to sign up to funding for global health initiatives in developing countries.

However, in the US, the government was shut down over Pres Donald Trump's insistence on spending more than \$5bn to build a wall to separate the country from Mexico; the UK is consumed by its Brexit debate; and French Pres Emmanuel Macron gave the 2019 meeting a miss, reported *Business Day*, 28 January.

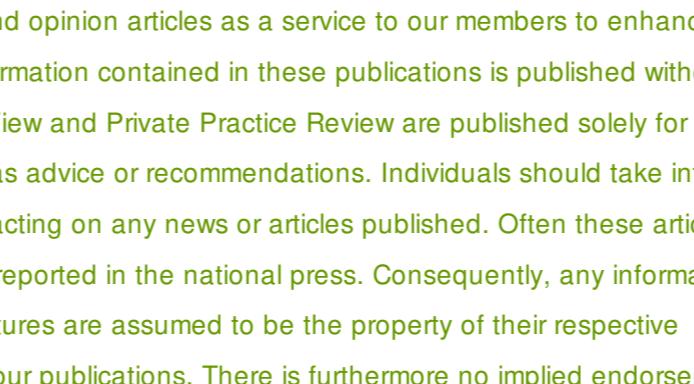
The authors of the review say their findings are good news but incompatible with fashionable low-carb diets.

According to *The Guardian*, the same research team also carried out the major review that informed WHO guidance on curbing sugar in the diet, leading to sugar taxes around the world.

- *Medical Brief*

View on Pharmaceutical News

Weight concerns over new HIV drug



Parents who opt not to vaccinate their children are one of the 10 biggest threats to global health this year, according to the World Health Organisation's (WHO), list of this year's biggest health concerns.

The WHO said vaccination is one of the most cost-effective ways of avoiding disease - it prevents 2 to 3 million deaths a year, and a further 1.5-m could be avoided if global coverage of vaccinations improved.

According to research published in the *Journal of STD & AIDS* revealed that more than 60% of young women in Soweto and Cape Town townships had the cari-causing human papillomavirus (HPV), which is responsible for most cervical cancer deaths in SA. Almost 30% have chlamydia - a treatable STI that causes infertility.

According to the article growing numbers of parents are preventing their daughters being vaccinated against HPV. More than a quarter of girls did not arrive for their booster dose in 2016, up from 21.4% in 2014 when the government started offering the vaccine in schools.

- Over the past five years, immunisation coverage in sub-Saharan Africa has stagnated at 72%, exposing populations to preventable diseases and outbreaks.

According to *The Star* on 28 January, the Competition Commission blocked Mediclinic's planned acquisition of Matsatsana Medical Health Services (MMHS) near Klerksdorp in July 2017.

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General News

SA is sitting on a sexually transmitted time-bomb



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