

# What's the function of pharmacists in the NHI? Health ENews 1

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Both public and private sector needs urgent intervention to correct the wrongs in the health care system, says pharmacists. (File Photo)

**The pharmacy profession plays a critical role in the National Health Insurance (NHI), says the department of health.**

The **NHI** Bill currently in Parliament has the objective to achieve universal access to quality health care services in South Africa in accordance with Section 27 of the constitution.

According to Precious Matsoso the director-general of the department of health, the medicine value chain plays a critical role in the overall performance of the health system under **NHI**. “The pharmacy professional is the key to managing the medicine value chain effectively, ensuring the success of NHI as, without medicines, treatment programmes cannot succeed,” she says, adding that patients need to have a dependable supply of the right medicines, available at the right time, in the right quantity, at the right place.

“The success of NHI will hinge on the support of all **stakeholders** involved, especially the pharmacy profession. Reimagining of the medicine supply chain across sectors will need to take place to ensure efficient alignment of services offered and that medicines are available, affordable and accessible,” says Matsoso. “The National Department of Health has been piloting and implementing numerous health system strengthening reforms aimed at improving medicine availability and access.”

According to Matsoso, efficient supply chain management will be reliant on robust planning, information systems, and appropriate skill sets to use the data to inform correct decisions. “Pharmacy professionals will be key resources as the custodians of medicines to enable the availability of essential medicines across the country.”

## **Two ends of the spectrum**

Sham Moodley, a community pharmacist, says both public and private sector needs urgent intervention to correct the wrongs in the health care system. “The private sector as per Health Market Inquiry is categorised by higher and rising costs, significant over utilisation, and known associated improvements in health care outcomes.

On the other side, Moodley says, the public sector is under-resourced and overburdened. “Most importantly, what the NHI debate has created is an opportunity for government, health care professionals, civil society, and patients to re-examine the existing scenario with a view to dramatically transforming the health care landscape,” he says.

“In August we passed a resolution in support of government’s commitments to the votes of national health coverage,” Moodley says. “In the spirit of social solidarity and in recognition of the rights of all citizens, we commit to achieving universal health care [through] the NHI.”

“We discussed both on the green paper and the white paper the extended role of the pharmacist in the provision of health care to all South Africans. This has included the extensive lists of collaborative models, disease management, acute and chronic care, primary health care, and many more,” says Moodley.

He adds all these services can be incorporated into the basket of the NHI.

### **Integral, but training needed**

Refiloe Mogale, president of the South African Association of Hospital and Institutional Pharmacists (SAAHIP) also believes pharmacists are vital in the health system for the NHI to be a success.

“We do understand that the objective of the NHI Bill is to achieve universal access through the establishment of the fund, [and] that the role of pharmacy assistants be recognised,” says Mogale.

“As pharmacists, we have a big role to play in the NHI Bill. The current curriculum for pharmacy assistance is not as extensive to cater for what the NHI bill demands,” says Mogale adding that currently, the pharmacy council is looking into that. However, she says training needs to be expanded. “We want to demonstrate the valuable services that we can add to the NHI Bill, we want our voices to be heard, we want to be visible,” she says. – Health-e News