

NHI will only see more moms and babies die – Andrew Louw – Politics Web 4 November 2019

It is unconscionable that the government remains insistent upon pushing ahead with its disastrous plan to nationalise health care while more and more evidence comes to light of the state's dire mismanagement of the public health system.

Complaints regarding Tshwaragano Hospital are the latest indictment of the state health sector, ironically at the same time at which public hearings on the National Health Insurance (NHI) bill have taken place in the province.

Last week, striking workers at the Tshwaragno hospital in Batlharos, near Kuruman, downed tools to highlight very serious challenges, including a lack of staff and a dire lack of equipment that already led to the closure of the hospital's operating theatre in August this year.

In effect, in emergencies, patients from the approximately 40-bed maternity ward are transported a distance of 20 kilometres to the Kuruman hospital for caesarean sections, and then transported back again, on a very bumpy road. Not only is this inter-hospital system uncomfortable and extremely painful for the patients, but it has also proved deadly to mothers and their babies, who have died as a direct result of complications suffered from this inefficient system.

It is further absolutely shocking that, by close of business last week, the department had not yet procured the necessary equipment to make the theatre at Tshwaragano hospital safe again, yet it had the audacity to call for the hazardous theatre to be reopened.

The theatre, in its current state, poses a direct risk to the lives of patients and staff. At the same time, so does the disconnected obstetric system, that operates between Tshwaragano and Kuruman hospitals.

It is inexplicable as to how the government could think that the health department, which is solely responsible for increasing the maternal and infant mortality rate in the John Taoale Gaetsewe (JTG) district, is anywhere near ready to usurp responsibility for private health care as well.

Since 2012, government has spent R4.3 billion on NHI pilot projects to test their readiness, and every single one of them has failed. The proof is in the pudding. How many more examples do we need to show that government is simply not capable of implementing a nation-wide health system?

The DA will be requesting the South African Human Rights Commission to investigate an increase in maternal and infant mortality rates in the JTG district.

At the same time, we will continue to fight against the NHI bill and rather throw our weight behind efforts that will raise the bar of the public healthcare, as have already been implemented in the DA-run Western Cape. It is, after all, not a coincidence that the WC has the lowest mortality rates and the highest life expectancy in the country, and also attracts more South African doctors and specialist, than any other province.

Implementing access to quality universal healthcare is not dependent on the NHI bill, as government wants us to believe. To the contrary, it stands a better chance if government can focus on getting the basics right and building on public health care system, not breaking down private healthcare.

Issued by Andrew Louw, DA Northern Cape Provincial Leader, 4 November 2019