Concerns raised over termination of community doctor contracts in Limpopo – News24 11 December 2019

The Limpopo Department of Health is to terminate the contracts of more than 150 community service doctors and other professionals at the end of the month because of dire financial constraints in the province.

The other professionals include 450 nurses and other allied workers who cannot be "absorbed" into the system. Some of the doctors include those who were sent to study in Cuba at the government's expense.

This comes at a time when the department was allocated a further R135m during the medium term expenditure framework (MTEF).

The termination of contracts was a major focal point during a march by health professionals in Polokwane on Monday.

Health MEC Dr Phophi Ramathuba blamed the inadequate funding of the health sector in the country for the decision to terminate the contracts.

Budget

She said the situation was not only confined to Limpopo and that an urgent meeting was convened with national health minister Dr Zweli Mkhize last week.

"We are also raising the issue that if we can bail out Eskom and SAA, why can't we be bailed out because the very same people we want to deliver electricity to, if they are not healthy, they won't be able to enjoy that electricity.

"For our facilities to run 24/7, it means we require more doctors. If I was holding the purse, I would prioritise this issue," Ramathuba said.

In an interview with News24 last month, Ramathuba indicated that the R20bn annual budget had almost been exhausted and suppliers could not be paid until the next financial year.

However, Cosatu provincial secretary Gerald Thwala said the department has to solicit more funds from the Treasury.

"Our problem is that you have a province that still needs more and more doctors, but the government tells them to go and sit at home. For NHI (National Health Insurance) to work, we need these doctors," Thwala said.

Finance MEC Seaparo Sekoati said he was looking into the financial affairs of the health department to "see if we can move their internal finances around".

"This is not the first time we have come across this information. We met with the leadership of Cosatu last Friday and looked at this matter. However, we could not conclude the matter due to other circumstances.

"The reality is that we are in a situation as a country that we are not doing well in terms of finances," Sekoati said.

Doctors and nurses are concerned that the medico-legal claims may sky rocket due to the lay-offs. The province is facing more R8bn in claims.