

President Ramaphosa fails to see crisis in SA healthcare system – Hospersa – IOL 15 February 2020

EFF leader Julius Malema said President Cyril Ramaphosa's SONA's "was a repetition of ideas". Picture: Sumaya Hisham/AP/African News Agency (ANA)

Cape Town - President Cyril Ramaphosa "does not see the crisis that the country's public healthcare system is in", the Health and Other Services Personnel Trade Union of South Africa (Hospersa) said.

Hospersa expressed disappointment at the lack of focus on the embattled public health sector during Ramaphosa's state of the nation address (SONA) in Parliament on Thursday night.

The union was disappointed that Ramaphosa made no mention of plans to rescue a depleted healthcare system characterised by poor infrastructure, maladministration, public health facilities operating on skeleton staff, and the high prevalence of violent attacks on healthcare workers, Hospersa said in a statement.

The union also "cautioned the president from making it seem like the country's public healthcare is in a good state while it continues to worsen without it being addressed, year after year".

During his address, Ramaphosa had failed to reassure the general public on the state of public health and provide interventions to address the crisis facing the country's healthcare system.

The only mention of the country's healthcare system during the near two-hour address was a three-sentence update on the National Health Insurance (NHI). Hospersa said the SONA failed to capture the imagination of health professionals who work long hours every day to serve communities with little support from government.

"Hospersa holds the view that the president does not see the crisis that the country's public healthcare system is in," Hospersa spokesman Kevin Halama said.

Thursday night's address only mentioned healthcare in passing and painted a picture that it was business as usual for the country's depleted healthcare system. Ramaphosa made no mention of the recent spike in attacks on healthcare workers at their places of work, and failed to even acknowledge the brave and dedicated healthcare workers that continue to work tirelessly at skeleton staff levels in depleted public health facilities without enough medical supplies, Halama said.

On Thursday night, Ramaphosa stated that in preparation for NHI, government had already registered more than 44 million people over 3000 clinics in the electronic health patient registration system and that this system was now being implemented in hospitals.

Hospersa was on record as giving its full support to the proposed system since its inception, and the union had engaged in various platforms to assist with the design and implementation of the ideal. However, Hospersa had reiterated that it was important to first address the basic service delivery problems in public health before taking the leap to such a wholesale change.

“The key issues we are highlighting are the structural problems of lacking human resource capacity in the public healthcare system and the paradox of staff shortages versus many unemployed doctors, nurses, and other healthcare workers,” Halama said.

"These issues are further exacerbated by poor management and institutionalised corruption through cadre deployment, nepotism, and shady procurement and maintenance deals. The successful implementation of NHI will need a resuscitated public healthcare system that is free of the current challenges.

“It has been 30 years since the first democratically-elected president, Nelson Mandela, walked out of the gates of Victor Verster Prison to usher in the dawn of democracy which also gave birth to the many rights we enjoy today, including the basic right of access to quality healthcare.

"Today, there are more than 85 percent of our people that are dependent on public healthcare which makes it imperative for the president to take the nation in his confidence on government’s plans to turn around the embattled public healthcare system,” Halama said.

In his first SONA, Ramaphosa spoke of a new dawn, while on Thursday night he concluded his address by stating that a new age had begun.

"We can only hope that this is not a broken record repeating itself year after year while the state of public healthcare in the country continues to be a side note in the president’s all-important state of nation address,” he said.

African News Agency (ANA)