

Edendale Hospital bed shortage means patients wait on chairs for days — GroundUp 2 March 2020

NEHAWU blames hospital management

The shortage of beds at Edendale hospital in Pietermaritzburg has seen some patients having to sleep on chairs in the main waiting room for days to get a bed.

Other patients are sleeping on ambulance stretchers in the passage of the main waiting room while some sit in wheelchairs with drips attached to them.

Edendale hospital is a National Health Insurance (NHI) pilot site.

National Education, Health Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) regional secretary Mazwi Ngubane said the bed shortage is becoming worse. He accused the hospital management of failing patients and the community as a whole.

We spoke to patients and visitors in the main waiting area on Tuesday 25 February. A man, who asked not to be named, had come to visit his aunt. He said he is not sure when his aunt will get a bed. “She was taken by an ambulance Sunday [23 February],” he said.

His aunt, who was in pain, was sipping *amahewu* (a sweet soft porridge drink). She had her drip on while sitting in a chair. A large blanket kept her warm.

“I came to check up on her on Monday [24 February]. She has been sitting here. I am told that she has no bed for now. ... It’s the third day now that she has been sitting on these cold chairs,” said the man.

Noxolo Shandu said she had a similar experience two weeks ago when her 83-year-old granny was admitted to hospital. Shandu, who is from Ashdown township, said it was a sad situation that they could do nothing about.

“My granny’s blood pressure was very high and she could not control it. She was admitted to Edendale. There were no beds available so she had to spend two days sleeping in casualty until they found her a bed. It is a crisis. The department needs to intervene,” said Shandu.

A woman from Elandskop had been waiting for a bed for several days. Struggling to speak, she said she came by ambulance. “I’m still waiting. The chairs are uncomfortable. There are some patients in wheelchairs. I feel for them because they are helpless. Some people have been here before me. If I get a bed today I will be lucky.”

An employee at the hospital said the shortage of beds has been a problem as far back as about 2011. The situation was bad then, but it has got worse. “It is sad but there is nothing we can do as employees on the ground. A lot is happening here. The issue of beds is one of the failures. We are emotional about what we see every day here,” said the employee.

Ngubane said that NEHAWU has addressed the shortage of beds with management but it has got worse. “The department must be harsh on the management. We are aware that the management is not doing a good job. The load of patients may increase but the management must have a way to deal with issues. Edendale hospital is one of the hospitals that is trusted by the residents. It’s very disappointing to see it having such a crisis,” said Ngubane.

The health department forwarded our queries to the hospital management, but we had not received a response at the time of publication.