

Health sector forum probes corruption, fraud - *Sunday World*, 4 December 2020

CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA- In the photos, shows the coronavirus isolation unit at Tygerberg Hospital in Cape Town, South Africa on March 11, 2020.

Johannesburg – The Health Sector Anti-Corruption Forum (HSACF) has dealt with 20 allegations of serious maladministration, fraud and corruption this year alone.

The HSACF has recently met to discuss progress made with regard to the implementation of initiatives to fight fraud and corruption in the health sector.

The HSACF comprises various stakeholders, including civil society, law enforcement agencies, health sector regulators, government departments and the private sector.

The forum is convened by the Special Investigating Unit (SIU) under the chairship of the Head of SIU, Advocate Andy Mothibi.

During the meeting, the forum heard that 13 of the reported allegations have been assessed and formally converted into investigations. This includes investigations by the SIU through proclamations signed by President Cyril Ramaphosa and investigations that are being undertaken by law enforcement agencies such as the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (the Hawks), as well as the National Department of Health.

In addition, the SIU said four allegations of maladministration, fraud and corruption in the public health sector have been assessed by the forum, and the SIU has submitted motivations for proclamations, in respect of these matters, to the Presidency for the approval.

The four allegations centred on the alleged improper award of health care risk waste contracts by provincial Departments of Health, while the other three allegations were assessed and closed.

“In the first matter, legal review processes are pending in the High Court.

“In the second matter, the national Department of Health has intervened in order to deal with governance issues at the affected State institution.

“In the third matter, the allegations have already been investigated and recommendations have been made,” SIU spokesperson, Kaizer Kganyago, said.

The HSACF also reported that current investigations have yielded the following notable outcomes:

- Criminal referrals which have been made in investigations involving the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), Office of the State Attorney, and COVID-19 procurement by State institutions across the national, provincial and local spheres of government;
- Lifestyle audits are being conducted where investigations have established that public servants are implicated in impropriety;

- Applications are being instituted for the rescission of judgments awarded against the State in medico-legal matters where investigations have established that the judgments were improperly obtained; and
- Further, settlement agreements that have been found to have been concluded improperly are being reviewed with a view to reclaiming money that has been paid by the State in circumstances where such settlements ought not to have been concluded.

“Civil litigation has been instituted in the Special Tribunal and the relief — including the freezing of pension funds of implicated officials, preservation and restraint orders, and recovery of State funds — has been obtained,” Kganyago said.

The HSACF was also briefed on the irregularities around the regulation of medical devices and personal protective equipment (PPE), particularly sub-standard PPE flooding the South African market; doctor registration irregularities; public health care workers conducting remunerative work outside of the public service without permission; and the monitoring of Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs), which are being hijacked in order to access COVID-19 funds.

Kganyago said the HSACF will engage further with the relevant stakeholders in order to assess how best the HSACF can assist with these matters in order to ensure proper consequence management.

Corruption prevention measures

The HSACF was further briefed on the progress made with regard to the implementation of prevention, advisory and awareness initiatives, which are intended to supplement the joint corruption prevention measures in the health sector.

According to the HSACF, three webinars have been successfully rolled out since October 2020 to date, with a focus on different thematic topics in the health sector.

“The webinars have thus far dealt with an overview of the HSACF, the NHI and its vulnerability to corruption, and corruption in the private health care sector.

“Based on the outcomes to date, the HSACF believes that the fight against fraud and corruption is being won through continuous multi-sectoral collaboration. The fact that this model is now being adopted in other sectors is testament to the success of the HSACF,” Kganyago said.