



## PRIVATE PRACTICE REVIEW

## NOTICE

*Private Practice Review* presents the reader with a summary of the most relevant breaking news in the local and global healthcare industry, as obtained from media sources, including the public broadcaster, independent television/broadcasters, independent news agencies, newspapers, radio and news sites. HealthMan strives to quote the Original Source. HealthMan compiles this information to provide the reader with a broad overview of the most recent events and developments as they are reported in the media. The views and opinions expressed in *Private Practice Review* are those of the authors of the media sources and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of HealthMan, its directors, employees and associates.

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## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

## OPINION:

## It's not 'vaccine nationalism,' that's the problem, Mr President...



"We can dress ourselves up as victims all we want, and pretend the countries that are getting the vaccine first are doing so because they're part of an exclusive First World cabal, but the reality is, SA's government simply bungled the purchasing of vaccines.

\*Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia and India are hardly icons of global capital, and yet they've all started vaccinating."

writes **Rob Rose, Editor: Financial Mail** (28 January 2021).

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## Treasury holds up vaccine contracts due to indemnification

"National Treasury is taking a hard line on the indemnification of pharmaceutical companies against vaccine 'adverse events', potentially putting the lives of huge numbers of South Africans at risk, frustrating the Department of Health (DOH) and complicating the negotiations with vaccine producers, reported *Business Maverick* (1 February 2021).

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## SPECIAL NEWS



## GPs pushing for central role in vaccine roll-out plans

No specific mention of general practitioners in the government's COVID-19 vaccination roll-out strategy announced last week has resulted in a determined call by a united body of family practitioners to push for an "obvious" central part the primary care practitioners should and can play in the national vaccination process.

"They [the government] haven't specifically said anything about GPs when discussing their roll-out plans. There has been a lot of talk about vaccine centres, pharmacies and state clinics, but nothing about GPs," said Dr Unben Pitsky, CEO of the Alliance of SA (Independent Practitioners Association (ASAP/A), member of the United Family Practitioners Forum (UFPF), to *Med Brief Africa*.

"It almost seems as if the GPs have been left out of the whole plan, which makes no sense. Collectively we have a big footprint of primary care doctors who have immediate access to patients who will need to be vaccinated. Again, it would make no sense to drive patients to vaccination centres - our patients - we have their files."

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## NEWS ON GOVERNMENT



## Government has now secured 42-m doses of C-19 vaccine

The SA government has secured another 20-m doses of COVID-19 vaccine from pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, taking the total on order to more than 42-m. This is the government's single biggest order to date, reported *Sunday Times* (31 January 2021).

Earlier, 9-m doses were secured from Johnson & Johnson, 12-m through Covax and 1.5-m from AstraZeneca through the Serum Institute of India (SII).

- According to Health Minister Zweli Mkhize government plans to vaccinate approximately 40-m people, (67% of the population) before the end of 2021.
- However, health officials expect only 32 650 000 vaccine doses before the end of 2021 - enough to vaccinate only 20-m people. This implicates a shortfall of 40-m doses, reported *News24* (2 February 2021).

"The doses are not expected to arrive in bulk shipment, but rather in batches of between one and three million doses a month, starting in May and June."

## SA ready to roll-out vaccination programme

SA's large pharmaceutical warehousing and logistics providers are ready to put their extensive networks and IT systems at the disposal of the government. Private hospital groups, pharmacies, medical practices, mines as well as business leaders have also offered help as SA embarks on the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine programme. However, *Business Times* reported on January 31, that there appear to already be some issues, with the DoH deciding to go out on open tender for the storage and distribution of vaccine doses. This reverses an earlier decision by Treasury to approve a closed bidding process for six months for four of SA's largest pharmaceutical/logistics companies: Biovac; Imperial Health Science, Cicks-owned IIPD and Danish-owned DSV. According to the DoH it would rather opt for an open tender process because elements of the bid such as shipping and customs clearance require "wider market participation".

## Department should take another look at proposed bill on medical negligence



The State Liability Amendment Bill (reintroduced to Parliament on January 25) was referred back to the Health and Justice departments. The Bill, providing a settlement structure of claims against the state in a case of medical negligence, seeks to reduce the effect of lump-sum payments on the state.

"Claims for medical negligence against the state have more than tripled over four years, rising to R104.5-bn in 2019 as patients seek redress for harm allegedly wrought by SA's overstretched public health system," reported *Business Day* (26 January 2021).

The bill proposes a "pay as you go" system of smaller, scheduled payments. Justice committee chair Bulelani Magwanishe said the bill should be returned to the departments for further processing before Parliament considers it.



## COVID-19 to impact NHI implementation

In opening the recent ANC national executive lekgotla, Pres Cyril Ramaphosa indicated that the government might not be able to achieve everything it planned, due to the pandemic. This included its landmark policy to overhaul the crisis-plagued national health system. While the pandemic has underscored the need for the National Healthcare Insurance (NHI) we must look at what impact it has had on our ability to proceed with the implementation of the NHI, said Ramaphosa.

"While the implementation of the NHI is already behind schedule and proceeding very slowly, this is the first time Ramaphosa has come close to acknowledging that the country is too ambitious in its timelines or that it may have to scale back on major social projects."

— *Business Day* (25 January 2021)

## PHARMACEUTICAL NEWS

## COVID-19 Update: Ivermectin



## Making sense of the ivermectin controversy

Fanned by despair and social media, there has been a massive movement, both locally and internationally, for the immediate repurposing of anti-parasitic drug ivermectin to treat COVID-19 writes *MedBriefNet* (20 January 2021). In South Africa, a number of practitioners have campaigned for the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) to give immediate emergency authorisation for ivermectin.

*The Times* reported that 11 local clinicians, public health specialists, community health workers and medical scientists called the Ivermectin Interest Group (IGS) on 2 January, sent a 41-page dossier to Health Minister Dr Zweli Mkhize, asking that the "accelerate research of ivermectin and fully explore its potential in the COVID-19 response in a responsible way".

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## ALSO READ:

Why uncontrolled use of drugs like ivermectin for COVID-19 can hinder clinical trials

Uncontrolled use of ivermectin

## ALSO READ:

Should I give myself ivermectin?  
- *Sunday Times* (31 January 2021)

Should I give myself ivermectin?

## SAHPRA will allow limited use of ivermectin

On January 28, *Business Day* reported that SAHPRA had decided to allow doctors to prescribe ivermectin for coronavirus patients under a tightly controlled "compassionate use" programme, while it waits for stronger evidence to emerge from clinical trials.

"The new vaccine, Novavax, is the only COVID-19 vaccine for which we have evidence that it protects against the variant dominating in SA," says Prof Shabir Madhi, executive director of the Vaccines and Infectious Diseases Analytics Research Unit at Wits and principal investigator in the Novavax COVID-19 trial.



## GENERAL NEWS



## Newly qualified doctors battle to find jobs

Scores of newly qualified junior doctors and hundreds of other medical staff are unable to find placements, despite staff shortages. Nearly 200 doctors, 325 nurses and 200 other health workers are unemployed, according to Hire our Medical Heroes, a campaign pressuring the government to take on more SA medical staff to tackle the pandemic.

A Department of Health spokesperson did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

Prof Alex Van Den Heever, an expert in the administration of public health at Wits University, said the government is trying to reign in its huge national wage bill, "so there will be an emphasis on freezing posts", including medical ones.



## Telemeds: Doctors wary

According to Andrew Brown, operations executive at Altron HealthTech (providing billing systems to doctors), the technology for telemedicine is "terrible" and works well, but "doctors haven't taken to it" - even though "patients are saying there is no way they are going in" to their doctor's practice. (*Business Times*, 31 January 2021).

In the first three months of 2020 less than 0.5% of billings were for virtual consultations. This increased to 8% in July and in January this year was 6%. According to a recent Twitter survey by Altron a high percentage of patients prefer in-person consultations as opposed to using an online platform. The discrepancy in the remuneration doctors receive for online (R250 – R300) and face-to-face consultation (about R400) makes it less financially viable for doctors to embrace the technology.

## Triumph for gene science

A research team of the Genomics Centre at Tygerberg Hospital in Cape Town recently published a paper in *Scientific Reports* describing the first whole genome sequencing carried out in SA on samples from South Africans. The team is led by Prof Craig Knicker. The breakthrough brings SA medicine closer to diagnostics and treatment tailored for an African context, reported *Sunday Times* (31 January 2021).

According to Prof Marlo Möller, a molecular biologist at Stellenbosch University, this is particularly important for SA because it is one of "the most genetically diverse countries in the world".

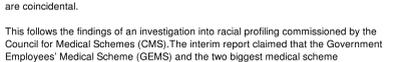
## NEWS ON MEDICAL SCHEMES



## Discovery denies racial profiling in letter to members

Discovery Health has published a letter to its members in which it says there was no racial discrimination in its fraud, waste and billing abuse (FWA) processes. According to the letter a minority of health practitioners act dishonestly, and their racial demographics are coincidental.

This follows the findings of an investigation into racial profiling commissioned by the Council for Medical Schemes (CMS). The interim report claimed that the Government Employees' Medical Scheme (GEMS) and the two biggest medical scheme administrators, Discovery Health and Medscheme, were more likely to conclude that black healthcare practitioners had committed FWA than their white counterparts.



## Schemes divided on vaccination contribution

Medical schemes have still not agreed how and to what extent they will contribute to the cost of inoculations for people without insurance cover.

- Discovery Health said in January that medical schemes had agreed to pay above cost for vaccine doses for their members - roughly 7-m adults over 15 - thereby "cross-subsidising" procurement for another 7-m adults without private cover;
- Momentum Health Solutions said the level of cross subsidy needs to be discussed;
- Fedhealth is worried about all the governance, legal and technical problems involved in cross-subsidy; and
- Medshield Medical Scheme and Bonitas Medical Fund said they need more information.

## Profmed says 'no' to vaccine funding plan

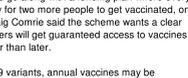


Profmed Medical Scheme has decided not to go along with a funding plan where every medical aid beneficiary would effectively pay for two more people to get vaccinated, on top of paying for their own shots. CEO Craig Comrie said the scheme wants a clear undertaking of how medical scheme members will get guaranteed access to vaccines sooner rather than later.

He said that with the rise of several COVID-19 variants, annual vaccines may be required, which will place significant strain on medical schemes as they will need to hold reserves to cater for these future uncertainties. An expectation that schemes' reserves that belong to members - should fund non-scheme members is in fact outside the legal and ethical decision-making powers that medical schemes can make, said Comrie. He proposed a call for voluntary donations.

## Circulars from the CMS

The following Circulars were published by the CMS in January/February 2021.



4 of 2021  
Update on CMS Operations on level 3 Lockdown

7 of 2021  
Funding of the COVID-19 vaccine by medical schemes

5 of 2021  
Quarterly Statutory Returns Submission for 2020(Q4)

8 of 2021  
Categorisation of assets in terms of Annexure B to the Regulations

6 of 2021  
IFRS 17 survey results and CMS monitoring tools

9 of 2021  
Proposed amalgamation between Discovery Health Medical Schemes and Quantum Medical Aid Society effective 1 April 2021

## SPECIAL NOTES

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