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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Focus on: **COVID-19**

SA not taking new health laws lying down



"Health department lawyers best get ready for the firing line as legal challenges to the Covid-19 regulations it wants to enact by early May are in the works," reported *Business Day* (29 April 2022).

The National Department of Health has published draft regulations to manage Covid-19, but in doing so has set itself up to face cases on at least three legal grounds. These are: its consultation process, accusations that freedom-limiting regulations are not constitutional, and questions over whether they are radical in nature, in other words serve their purpose of controlling Covid-19.

"With cases being prepared behind the scenes, the department will be grateful if it has taxpayers to fund its legal costs. But perhaps it should draft rules more slowly, with enough time to digest the comments from citizens, and consider how much freedom it needs to restrict for a disease that is, sadly, here to stay."

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Also Read: *Two years into the Covid disaster, where do we stand?*

- *Moneyweb* 15 May 2022

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Minister defends government's Covid-19 response

According to Health Minister Joe Phaahla almost 70% of the SA population has come into contact with Covid-19. Although more than 35-m South Africans have been vaccinated, millions still need to get their jabs. *TimesLive* reported on 12 May 2022 that the Minister defended government's response to the pandemic, with his comments directed at 'armchair critics' who are against the implementation of protective measures, saying they are for the benefit and safety of South Africans.

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Also read Peter Bruce's article 'Pipe dreams go up in smoke' in *Times Live* (15 May 2022) by clicking on the button below

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ADVERTORIAL



A Seat at the Table

An opinion piece by Maritsa Doyle, Wealth Manager at PPS Wealth Advisory

The repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic have been felt by all. As much as one must acknowledge the immense impact on all and sundry, some of the hardest hit must be women, and especially working women.

The COVID-19 crisis has set back women and their seats at the corporate table in two respects. Women are struggling to juggle their lives and strive for some semblance of balance.

According to PwC's *Women in Work Index 2021*, "the damage from COVID-19 and government response and recovery policies, is disproportionately being felt by women". Although this study does not include South Africa, PwC South Africa's Chief Economist, Lulu Krugel's states that "there are similar patterns in South Africa... where the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted hundreds of thousands of women's lives, as well as putting a damper on years of progress around gender equality".

The index, which measures female economic empowerment across 33 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, also shows that the COVID-19 pandemic caused a "secession" in many companies, or in other words, women resigned in an effort to find balance in their lives.

To women contemplating resignation and aiming for a life with more peace and balance – I have the utmost respect. But then, there are those like me who want a seat at the table. If they do not give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair. Out-source the things that are not that important so that you can focus on what is important to you.

To read the full article, click on the button below

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NEWS FROM GOVERNMENT

Board of Healthcare Funders asks CC for exemption



In a notice, published in the *Government Gazette* (6 May 2022) the BHF states that it has applied to the Competition Commission to be exempted from certain provisions of Chapter 2 of the Competition Act No 89 of 1998. The BHF request an exemption in respect of potentially anti-competitive practices and agreements (currently prohibited by the Act).

The board stated that:

- The BHF, in collaboration with its members, intends to publish a Scale of Benefits;
- The BHF and its members would like to negotiate collectively with healthcare providers on coding and tariffs before publishing a Scale of Benefits; and
- The BHF seeks an exemption to enable it to make submissions freely and effectively on behalf of its members to regulatory authorities and government institutions regarding prices, quality/grade practice, etc.

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PROVINCES

Provinces get 86% of health budget

On 10 May, 2022 Health Minister Dr Joe Phaahla tabled a R64.5-bn budget for financial year 2022/23. 86% (R55.8-bn) of the budget will be transferred to provinces as conditional grants, reported *The Citizen* (11 May 2022)

According to Rural Health Advocacy Project director, Russell Rensburg, failure by provinces to manage the grants could lead to consistency in the implementation framework not being achieved. Regarding the Covid pandemic Phaahla said government has been administered to 49.5% of all adults.

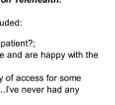
Measures to strengthen health delivery included:

- Urging MPs to support the NH Bill to attain universal health coverage for all South Africans;
- Setting aside R1.5-bn to be managed by the Health Department - supporting various infrastructure projects in NH pilot districts;
- Issuing contracts towards the construction of a multi-billion-rand Limpopo Academic Hospital; and
- R6.8-bn in direct conditional grants, managed by them under the Health Facilities Revitalisation programme to construct, revitalize and maintain hospitals, clinics and other facilities.

'Children are dying because of horrendous state of our public hospitals'

Daily Maverick (22 May 2022) published the following open letter by a paediatrician to the Health Department.

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SPECIAL NEWS



Telemedicine: COVID-adjusted rules still apply...

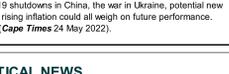
Medical practitioners are ill-advised to use social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Twitter when communicating with patients "as it blurs the lines and may lead to ethical dilemmas," Dr Blessiet Nkambule, MPS medico-legal advisor, reminded delegates to the recent Hybrid Gauteng General Practitioner Forum (GGPF) conference in her presentation on "Telemedicine in GP Practice". In this instance she was referring to the *#PCSA Booklet 10 on Telehealth*.

Practitioner concerns about digital health consultations, included:

- "Will I be able to accurately assess and diagnose the patient?";
- "How sure can I be that patients understand my advice and are happy with the plan?";
- "I am concerned about the digital divide and inequality of access for some patients"; "I don't feel confident using the technology... I've never had any training, and importantly,
- "What do I need to cover in order to gain patient consent for having a teleconsultation?"

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FINANCIAL NEWS



Revenue exceeds R30-bn

Business Day reported on 24 May 2022 that pharmacy group Dis-Chem's revenue exceeded R30-bn for the first time in its history.

After-tax profit rose by 29.4% to R890-m and total dividend was up by 27.6% to 39.7c per share.

According to CFO Raul Morais, the group is not actively hunting for additional assets, but was rather focusing on getting more out of existing ones by leveraging its brand.

Clicks vows to fight for consumers in patent battle with Bayer

Fin24 reported on 6 May that Clicks' CEO Bertina Engelbrecht said the pharmaceutical retailer will take on multinational pharmaceutical giant Bayer in court over the supply of generic blood-thinning medication.

"Since 2010, Bayer has been selling blood-thinning drug Xarelto in SA, and it introduced a second brand, Xarelto, in 2020. Both medications contain rivaroxaban, an active ingredient patented by Bayer. But in 2021, Bayer hauled generic Indian drug producer Dr Reddy's Laboratories to patent court for supplying Rivaroxan, a generic blood-thinning drug, to the SA market, citing patent infringement. Xarelto costs R36.48 per tablet, and Xarelto is R30.60, while Rivaroxan is much cheaper at R21.25 per tablet."

Moneyweb reported on 29 April that Clicks Group is forecasting diluted headline earnings per share (Heps) for the full year ending August 31 2022 to grow by between 30% and 35%, up from the 77.6 cents it reported in the 2021 comparable period.

This forecast comes despite the fact that the trading environment remains challenging.



Netcare posts strong results

Private hospital group Netcare's earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation increased by 8.1% to R1.6-bn; headline earnings a share was adjusted from 28.9c to 35.2 cents in the six months to March 31; and an interim dividend of 20c a share was declared.

Netcare CEO Richard Friedland, warned about the risks posed by an uncertain global environment, saying Covid-19 shutdowns in China, the war in Ukraine, potential new coronavirus variants, and rising inflation could all weigh on future performance. (*Cape Times* 24 May 2022)

PHARMACEUTICAL NEWS

SA to give away millions of jabs

By April this year SA had 23-m doses of Covid-19 vaccines in stock. At the current rate of vaccinations - about 40,000 a day - this amounts to 19 months' supply, reported *Sunday Times* (8 May 2022).



Health Minister Joe Phaahla said the department "is exploring opportunities for donating excess vaccines to other countries. If this is not possible, then excess vaccines that have reached their expiry date will be discarded. In light of the excess stock, no vaccines are currently being procured.

"Health records from the Department of Health show that of the 2 370 Covid patients in hospital, two-thirds are unvaccinated."

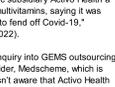
- At the recent Global Covid-19 Summit, Pres Cyril Ramaphosa urged multilateral and philanthropic organisations to procure Covid-19 vaccines from African producers to ensure the continent retains its fledgling manufacturing capacity. This follows a warning from SA's biggest pharmaceutical manufacturer, Aspen Pharmacare, that it might have to close its vaccine production line and news that state backed vaccine manufacturer Biovac may scale back its plans to bottle Pfizer's jab due to lack of orders, reported *Business Day* (13 May 2022).

Vaccination + infection = better Covid immunity

"People who are vaccinated and then get infected with Omicron may be primed to overcome a broad range of coronavirus variants, reported, *Bloomberg News* (16 May 2022). Results of studies by BocAnTech and the University of Washington show that the millions of vaccinated people who've caught Omicron probably won't become seriously ill from another variant soon. The research still has to be confirmed.

NEWS FROM MEDICAL SCHEMES

CMS blamed for lack of low-cost options



Up to 20-m South Africans from low-income households could afford basic private healthcare services if the Council for Medical Schemes (CMS) stopped stalling on plans for cheap, pared-down benefits options, reported *Business Day* (20 May 2022).

"To the frustration of the medical schemes industry, this work is still not complete, and the CMS in January granted health insurers yet another extension of the exemption period to March 31, 2022. It means that medical schemes can still not launch their own low-cost benefit options, while the providers of indemnity products that were granted exemption when the demarcation regulations came into force have been protected from new competitors for the past five years.

"It's true, talk of the ANC pressuring the CMS to put the brakes on the low-cost benefit options (LCBO) framework as it might pose an impediment to NH would be a 'moral tragedy', said *Actuaries & Consultants* joint-CEO Christoff Raath at the recent *Healthcare Funders (BHF) Conference*.

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CMS investigates conduct of actuary after criticism

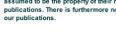
Business Day reported on 24 May 2022 that the CMS announced it is investigating the conduct of the actuary who publicly accused it last week of stalling the development of cheap, pared-down options aimed at low-income households.

'Tech start-up partners with Dis-Chem'



South Africa's newest app-based medical service provider, Kena Health, offers cost-effective medical and mental healthcare to the uninsured and joins a growing list of tech-based health service providers entering the market, reported *Fin24* (8 May 2022).

"Launched in March, Kena Health has bagged over 10 000 downloads since launching on 9 March, and its founder and CEO, Saul Kornik, plans to expand to markets beyond SA borders. He said the idea is to use technology to lower the cost of medical care and make it available to millions of South Africans who are currently excluded from private care because of cost. Consultations are conducted using text, voice or video at a cost lower than standard consultation fees.



GEMS defends vitamin contract

"The Government Employees' Medical Scheme (GEMS), SA's biggest medical scheme for public servants, defended its decision to award Afrocen's subsidiary Activo Health a multimillion-rand contract to provide its members with multivitamins, saying it was responding to their demands for immune boosters to fend off Covid-19," reported *Business Day* (11 May 2022).

This follows the CMS announcement that it has started an inquiry into GEMS outsourcing the selection of a vitamin provider to its managed care provider, Medscheme, which is also a subsidiary of Afrocen. GEMS said it wasn't aware that Activo Health was also a subsidiary of Afrocen when the contract had been awarded.

On 13 May 2022 *Business Day* reported that the Independent Community Pharmacy Association (ICPA) warned GEMS that its controversial plan to deliver multivitamins to all its adult beneficiaries flew in the face of good clinical practice, and that its chosen product was overpriced. ICPA CEO, Jackie Maimis said there was insufficient high-quality evidence demonstrating that multivitamins and minerals were beneficial for the public, and global health authorities did not recommend routine prescribing of these products.

CIRCULARS FROM THE CMS

No new circulars were published by the CMS in May 2022.



SPECIAL NOTES

Psychiatrist: Consulting Rooms to let in Fourways
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The office is on the 2nd floor of the practice and is approximately 32m² with a modern loft feel.
Rent: R11 000, including VAT.
Includes services and utilities. Cash/cheque/personalised prescription (approx R1500 extra)
Contact Rachele Tiller
Rachpractice@gmail.com

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Contact Steve Pufford (optometrist): 077 477 0547

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Position for an Ophthalmic Surgeon at the Eye Laser Clinic Group wanting to reside and work in Cape Town with view to partnership. Preference for retinal surgery experience. Equity partnership available.
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