



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, independent newspaper news agencies, newspapers, radio and news sites. HealthMan strives to quote the Original Source. HealthMan compiles this information to provide the reader with a brief 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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FOCUS ON NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE BILL

The National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill is currently undergoing a public consultation process, with a number of healthcare, civil society and political groups presenting on why the new system should or should not be introduced. Here are a few highlights of the proposals submitted to Parliament's Portfolio Committee on Health.

This could be the death of private healthcare in SA, warns government body

The National Planning Commission (NPC) has recommended that the medical scheme industry should be allowed to continue operating indefinitely, despite the planned introduction of the new National Health Insurance (NHI).

Section 33 of the Bill states that once the NHI has been fully implemented, medical schemes may only offer complementary cover to services not reimbursable by the NHI Fund. "Rather than dismissing private health cover completely, the NPC said that medical schemes and related administration markets require regulatory interventions essential to make the industry more affordable." - **BusinessTech** (10 Feb 2022).

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NPC proposes less power for Minister of Health

"The NPC has proposed that the Health Minister's powers be curtailed to avoid subjecting the public and private health sectors to a single source of potential failure when the NHI system is introduced," reported **City Press** (13 Feb 2022).

"The commissioners said that the bill appears to be drafted on the assumption of a perfectly efficient, ethical and capable state, and tends to ignore the reality of inadequate public healthcare services. The NPC sees the bill as a step in the right direction, but it submits that the bill in its current form is lacking in critical detail in some key areas and contains provisions that are problematic."

It may be unconstitutional, warns Mediclinic

"Private hospital group Mediclinic warned in its submission to Parliament's Health portfolio committee that the proposed NHI system may be unconstitutional, is inadequately funded, and will destroy private healthcare and medical aid cover," reports **MedicalBrief** (8 February 2022).

- **The Portfolio Committee on Health also heard submissions from Bonitas, Discovery Health, Poimed and MedSchemes**

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Big NHI tax expected for SA **Common themes in hearing** **Solidarity warns about tax hikes**

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Also read - under **News from Medical Schemes** an article by Neil Kirby, director of healthcare & life sciences law at Werkmans Attorneys in **Business Day** (10 Feb 2022)

Reminders on upcoming comment deadlines:

- 14 Feb 2022: Exemption applications for gap cover & other health insurance products at CMS
- 17 Feb 2022: Pharmacist Reproductive Services
- 21 Feb 2022: Essential Services Committee on medicines manufacturing & distribution of certain medicines being an essential service;
- 28 Feb 2022: SALRC on medico-legal claims
- 28 Feb 2022: CAMS licensing submissions

NEWS FROM SAPPF

SAPPF reigniting its efforts to tackle problems in healthcare industry

Despite all good intentions to tackle the many daunting issues faced by South Africa's private specialists in daily practice, not much has happened over the past seven years. Uncertainty and a lack of progress on matters such as the NHFCL coding, the proposed Certificate of Need, funder relationships and the recommendations of the Health Market Inquiry continue with the two-year Covid pandemic having halted most efforts to address and engage on these challenges.

However, with the pandemic appearing to be waning and practices returning to some normality, the South African Private Practitioners Forum (SAPPF) is reigniting its efforts to tackle the problems head-on in a bid to ensure that lasting and sustainable solutions are found. **MedBrief Africa** spoke to **SAPPF CEO, Dr Simon Strachan**, on the SAPPF's plans for what he describes as "the year of action".

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NEWS FROM GOVERNMENT

Government eases SA vaccine rules

The government has slashed the interval between Covid-19 jabs and announced that adults can have different shots when they go for their boosters, reported **BusinessLive** (21 Feb 2022).

According to Dr Nicholas Crisp, Deputy Director-General of Health, SA has 21-m vaccine doses of Johnson & Johnson's (J&J) and Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines on hand, with 7-m Pfizer jabs expiring by mid-year. Meanwhile, less than half the country's adults have been inoculated.

From 23 February the interval between the first two Pfizer jabs has been halved to three weeks, and the time to a booster has been cut to three months instead of six. The booster can be either a third Pfizer shot or a J&J jab. Adults who received a primary J&J shot became eligible for a booster of either vaccine two months after their first jab.

- **Wits University vaccinologist Shabir Madhi** said the change is long overdue, as a mix-and-match strategy is likely to offer better protection against infection and severe illness.
- **Medical Research Council president Glenda Gray** said studies investigating mixing and matching vaccines have shown the strategy increases the breadth of the body's immune response.

'Has the government abandoned vaccination?'

"The government appears to have quietly deprecised its vaccination programme," wrote prof Nicoli Ntshong & Jeremy Seekings in **GroundUP** (17 Feb 2022). In his recent State of the Nation Address (SONA), President Cyril Ramaphosa noted that only 42% of the adult population has been fully vaccinated (ignoring the government's initial target of 50% vaccinated by this time). He (then) moved on to other important issues, ducking important policy issues such as vaccine mandates and addressing vaccine hesitancy.

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CC slams company for cancer drug pricing

The Competition Commission (CC) filed a referral to prosecute Switzerland-based healthcare company Roche Holding AG (RocheAG) - and its subsidiaries - for their pricing of the breast cancer drug **Trastuzumab**, reported **TimesLive** (9 Feb 2022). According to the CC more than 10 000 breast cancer patients were unable to get much-needed treatment due to "excessive pricing" on the drug. In a statement, the CC said their referral also alleges that the excessive price was a violation of basic human rights.

117 vaccine disputes lodged with CCMA

Only two of 117 mandatory vaccination disputes lodged with the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) have been arbitrated. Both were not in favour of staff who opposed their employer's mandatory vaccination policy, reported **News24** (9 Feb 2022).

According to a directive on Covid-19 vaccination employers are required to produce reasonable resolutions so that all parties are accommodated should employees refuse Covid-19 vaccinations on medical and constitutional grounds.

According to some legal practitioners CCMA awards do not create a precedent, are not binding and are subject to review by higher courts, which may set those decisions aside.

Also read Katharine Child's article in Charging maker of cancer drug may backfire in BusinessDay (10 Feb 2022)

SAMA chair steps down

On 17 February, the chair of the SA Medical Association (SAMA), Dr Angelique Coetzee, announced her resignation - with immediate effect - at a SAMA board meeting. She will remain as an ordinary member of the SAMA board. Her resignation follows a radio interview in January during which Coetzee said that the admission process to medical schools was politicised and alleged that race played a role in determining acceptance to medical faculties. - **Business Live** (18 Feb 2022)

ADVERTORIAL

The Cost of weathering Climate Change for Homeowners

Many global communities are exposed to increasingly volatile weather conditions that are in part enhanced by the growing effects of climate change.



This includes record-setting episodes of extreme temperatures, rainfall and flooding, droughts and wildfires, rapidly intensifying tropical cyclones and late season severe convective storms. Aon's 2021 Weather, Climate and Catastrophe Insight report evaluates the increasing frequency and severity of disruptive natural disasters and their resulting economic losses, which includes three notable events in South Africa - Cyclone Eloise in January 2021 (\$80+ million), floods (\$75 million) and wildfires in the Western Cape in April 2021 (\$100+ million). **To read the article, click on the button below:**

[The cost of weathering climate change for homeowners](#)

FINANCIAL NEWS

Assistance in difficult Covid-19 circumstances

With the COVID-19 pandemic having placed strain on the economy as a whole, and on some of our members, we took it upon ourselves to engage a highly reputable firm of attorneys, well versed in restructuring, during the latter part of 2021 to determine how we can best assist those of our members who are experiencing financial difficulty. Following the advice received, we understand that there are two ways, in the main, in which members can turn their businesses around, with either the use of informal restructuring tools or with the use of the more formal business rescue process. If any member is experiencing financial difficulties, we urge you to make contact with us sooner rather than later so that we can assist you in determining the prospects of turning around your business and guiding you through that process. Some of our members may already experience this, if any of their suppliers are experiencing financial distress and in such instances, we encourage you to engage with us in an effort to determine how we can assist you in such circumstances.

Dis-Chem sees double-digit revenue growth

Pharmaceutical chain store Dis-Chem posted double-digit revenue growth for the 21-week period from 1 September, 2021, to 28 January, 2022, according to **Business Report** (15 Feb 2022). Revenue was 15.2% higher at R12.7-bn in the reported period, while retail revenue increased by 15.5% to R11-bn compared to the same period last year. It also added seven new Dis-Chem stores in the reporting period, which contributed R7-m to retail revenue. Dis-Chem said during the 21-week period it also administered 895 000 Covid-19 vaccine doses, contributing R341-m to retail revenue, with 50% of that contribution coming from standalone mass sites.

'Ascendis Health aims to pep up its future'

"Valued at R372-m on the JSE after a 97% share price fall over the past five years, Ascendis Health is looking for shareholder approvals for asset sales that will extinguish debt and leave it with about R200-m in cash for growth," reported **Business Day** (21 Feb 2022). The group had debt of R582-m at end-December and is facing a spike in interest payments at end-June when it matures. "According to interim CEO, Cheryl-Jane Kujenga, Ascendis will be engaging with shareholders, while the board and the group need to build its credibility. "The group is also looking to sell Ascendis Pharma, which has therapeutic pharmaceutical brands.

Discovery flags profit growth

Business Day reported on 18 February that SA's largest private health insurer, Discovery, has flagged an up to 10% rise in profits for its half-year to end-December, boosted by better-than-expected client retention. "Normalised profit from operations is expected to rise by 5% -10% in the six months to end-December, Discovery said in an update. This was in spite of R3.4-bn in Covid-19 claims. Normalised profit could rise as much as R450.7-m. Headline earnings are expected to rise by 70%-80%, or by as much as R1.47-bn."

Healthcare staffing shortages a 'rising concern' for medtechs, says Moody's

"Moody's Investors Service has called out healthcare staffing shortages and supply chain disruptions as two factors that could continue to affect medical device companies into 2022," reported **MedTechDive** (9 Feb 2022).

"While shortages of components and elevated shipping costs are expected to be 'manageable,' hospital capacity constraints could impact procedure-dependent medtechs," according to Moody's quarterly report, released on 31 January, 2022. "Demand for Covid-19 testing has remained elevated for longer than expected, but it's not anticipated to continue at current levels. Still, Moody's expects that rapid at-home tests could provide ongoing revenue for some diagnostics companies, even if at lower levels in the future."

PHARMACEUTICAL NEWS

'How BioNTech undermined SA-based WHO vaccine hub'

"BioNTech has become a household name in SA because of its partnership with Pfizer and the resulting vaccine that has been administered almost 23-m times in the country in the fight against Covid-19. Now, however, its name is being dragged through the mud," wrote **Tanya Faber** in **TimesLive** (11 Feb 2022).

An investigation by the **British Medical Journal** (BMJ) and German newspaper **Die Welt** shows that it does not have vaccine equity at heart and is instead hoping to exploit regulations to ship vaccines made in Europe.

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SAHPRA gives green light to Chinese Covid-19 vaccine

Business Day reported on 7 Feb that the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) has accepted the Chinese Covid-19 vaccine, Sinopharm.

"This authorisation is based on acceptable safety, quality and efficacy data submitted by MC Pharma," SAHPRA said in a statement. The authorisation is subject to a number of conditions, which include that the vaccine is supplied and administered in accordance with the national Covid vaccination programme.

- Meanwhile SAHPRA has also given pharmaceutical manufacturer Moxi permission to import 8-m capsules of its coronavirus pill molupiravir over the next six months, enough to treat 200 000 patients, reported **Business Day** (18 February, 2022). Molupiravir was initially hailed as a possible gamechanger. However, according Dr Nicholas Crisp, Deputy Director-General of Health, an evaluation showed that it is not significantly better than current Covid-19 treatment.

NEWS FROM MEDICAL SCHEMES

'Schemes will have to assess their economic relevance'

"Medical schemes will have to assess their economic relevance," wrote Neil Kirby, director of healthcare & life sciences law at Werkmans Attorneys in **Business Day** (10 Feb 2022).

"Current benefit options may need to be amended, if not abandoned entirely, or reduced where the NHI Fund operates and usurps certain services into its offering. Should that be the intention of the NHI Bill, medical schemes will have to assess their place and, more importantly, their economic relevance in the context of an NHI Scheme.

"It may be that the Bill, while not compelling a person to become a 'user' of the new scheme but making the payment of contributions to the fund mandatory, is in effect forcing the population to join the fund to access some healthcare services that will not be available from alternative sources such as medical schemes," said Kirby.

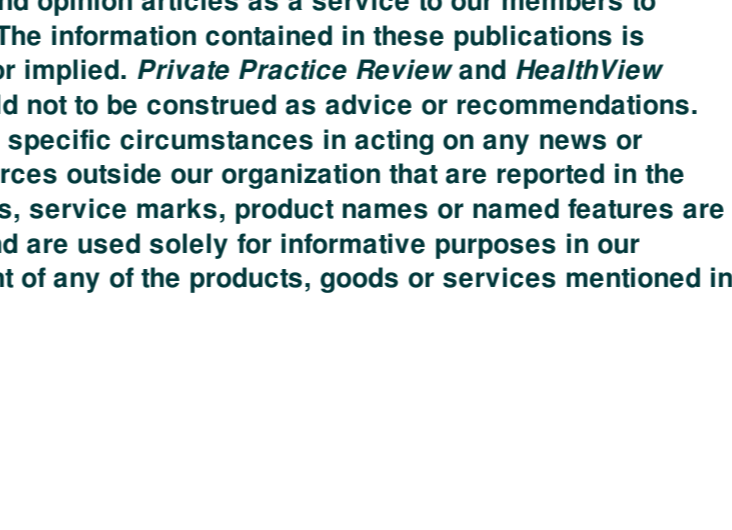
Diabetes sensor only for some

"The Council for Medical Schemes (CMS) has decided that it will only consider funding continuous glucose monitoring (CGM) on a case-by-case basis," reported **The Citizen** (15 Feb). The CGM sensors could help diabetics maintain their blood sugar levels and reduce hospitalisations.

CMS spokesperson Mmathele Mphahane said the CGM system was presently not readily available in the SA public healthcare sector as required by the Medical Schemes Act (131 of 1998). She said the council's current position is that the monitor is not at the PMB level of care, owing to its cost-effectiveness following affordability studies and its lack of proven improved health outcomes.

CIRCULARS FROM THE CMS

The following circulars were published by the CMS in February 2022.



- Circular 7 of 2022: Revised Healthcare Utilisation Annual Statutory Return
- Circular 10 of 2022: Standard guidelines on the format of business plans submitted to the Council for Medical Schemes
- Circular 8 of 2022: Categorisation of assets in terms of Annexure B to the Regulations
- Circular 11 of 2022: CMS Brand awareness survey
- Circular 9 of 2022: Demarcation Exemption Renewal Framework

SPECIAL NOTES

VACANCY FOR SPECIALIST PHYSICIAN

Life West Coast Private Hospital (Vredenburg) has a vacancy for an energetic Specialist Physician to join their well-established practice.

Must be willing to work after-hours.

Life West Coast Private Hospital has 61 general ward beds and a 6-bed ICU.

For more information, email: accounts@westcoastphysician.co.za

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