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Covid vaccine contracts hold SA ransom

“These deals (Covid-19 vaccine contracts) were concluded at a time of global scarcity, when Western governments with domestic vaccine manufacturing capacity prioritised their citizens, leaving African nations that relied entirely on imports scrambling for supplies,” reported ***Business Day*** (6 September 2023).

The agreements, analysed and published by the Health Justice Initiative (HJI) and a multistakeholder group, reveal that SA paid:

- \$10 a dose to J&J, a 15% premium on the price the company charged the EU, for at least 30 million doses; • \$10 a dose to Pfizer, a 32.5% premium on the price the company charged the AU, for at least 30 million doses;
- \$5.35 a dose to the SII for AstraZeneca’s shot, more than 2.5 times the price the EU paid AstraZeneca directly for 1.5 million doses; and
- At least \$10.55 a dose to Covax, which media reports previously indicated agreed to supply SA with doses to cover 10% of its population.

It calculated that SA agreed to pay \$734-m (R14.1-bn) for the more than 60-m doses it ordered from these suppliers, including advance payments of \$94-m that were not fully refundable.

Hospital infections claim lives of thousands of patients

“Hospital infections, mostly due to poor infection control measures, affected nearly 8 000 Gauteng patients last year, most of them at Chris Hani Baragwanath, according to Gauteng Health & Wellness MEC Nomantu Nkomo-Ralehoko. – ***Medical Brief*** (27 July 2023)

Weekly and monthly Healthcare Associated Infection (HAI) surveillance records from the Department of Health revealed the following:

Gauteng’s nine regional hospitals accounted for 1 617 (22%) of all hospital-acquired infections, ranging from 138 infections at Pholosong Hospital to 626 infections at Leratong hospital, more than double the next highest figure of 255 infections at the Rahima Moosa Hospital.

Government implements systems to prevent stockouts

Spotlight reported on 1 Nov 2023 that medicine stockouts continue, despite the SA government’s electronic surveillance systems like RxSolution and Stock Visibility System to monitor medicine stocks in healthcare facilities nationwide, reported ***Spotlight*** (1 Nov 2023).

“These systems allow healthcare workers to track and monitor medicine levels, generate reports, and advise on ordering to prevent shortages or overstocking.

“According to healthcare workers and managers, having access to data on drug stocks has allowed them to be more proactive in managing supplies. However, infrastructure issues in rural hospitals, load shedding, and the global pharmaceutical supply chain’s security contribute to ongoing stockouts.”

To address the international stockout issue, experts suggest reducing overreliance on individual

suppliers, splitting tenders, and ensuring multiple suppliers for vital medicines to reduce vulnerability in the supply chain.

Another clean audit for Western Cape's health department

The Auditor-General's Office reported that the Eastern Cape, Free State, and Northern Cape were issued qualified audits for the fourth consecutive year. – Business Day (10 October 2023). Gauteng, Mpumalanga, North West, KwaZulu-Natal, and the National Health Department were given unqualified audits with certain findings, and Limpopo is still finalising its audit. This is in contrast to the Western Cape's health department, which has achieved clean audits over those years.

In the 2022/23 financial year R248bn of the public health budget was allocated to provincial health departments.

It was also reported that many departments struggle to manage pay-outs related to medical negligence claims. For 2022/2023, the liability was R67bn for eight provinces, with Limpopo's figures still pending.

Most interns, junior doctors, finally placed

In July Medical Brief reported that more than 1 100 medical interns and junior doctors have finally been placed for the medical Internship and Community Service Programme (ICSP) – just days before they were due to start work on 1 July.

However, some junior doctors, including some on government bursaries, remain in limbo, still waiting to be placed for community services.

SA-trained nurses to fill vacancies in Germany

In July Business Day reported that the SA government is in discussions with Germany to employ nurses trained in SA to address the labour shortage crisis in Germany, the largest economy in Europe. "According to Khaya Sodidi, the Deputy Secretary-General of the Democratic Nursing Organisation of SA (DENOSA), the SA government is interested in releasing 20 000 unemployed nurses to Germany due to financial constraints preventing their employment within South Africa."

Tembisa staff linked to R1-bn fraud still at work

In July Medical Brief reported that nine senior staff members, implicated in a tender scandal of R1bn at Tembisa Hospital, were still at work. Although they were identified by the Special Investigating Unit (SIU) six months earlier no action was taken against them.

Health MEC Nomantu Nkomo-Ralehoko told the provincial legislature that the process to discipline them was still "being initiated".

In the probe, the officials were all positively linked to rubber-stamping purchase agreements, in some cases based on fake and forged documentation, that saw the hospital facility paying excessively high prices.

'Ramaphosa unleashes SIU in R1bn Tembisa scandal'

In August, News24 reported that President Cyril Ramaphosa authorised a Special Investigating Unit (SIU) probe into Tembisa Hospital's R1-bn extraction networks.

The proclamation was signed nearly two years after whistleblower Babita Deokaran was gunned down outside her Johannesburg home after she flagged a raft of suspicious transactions at Tembisa Hospital.

Health Minister accused of cover-up

“Health Minister Joe Phaahla’s recent suspension of a health department advocate, Maile Ngake - who discovered R1.2bn in tender fraud - is suspected to be part of a more extensive corruption cover-up, reported **News 24** (10 September 2023).

In October 2020 Ngake revealed that several laws were violated when awarding security contracts to 22 companies by the North West Health Department. A report from the Auditor-General’s office in September 2020 indicated that the security tender exceeded its initial budget of R900m by almost R322m.

“Internal documents and sources indicate that Ngake’s suspension is part of an elaborate scheme by Phaahla to conceal corruption, following legal action by Dr Buyani Makhubu, a former supply-chain management director for the North West Health Department who was dismissed in August of the previous year.”

COVID Covid-19 vaccines: ‘Health Department squandered the opportunity’

“Health activists are right to draw attention to this grossly unfair situation. (Covid-19 vaccine deals) But the far bigger scandal is that the Health Department squandered the opportunity after spending an estimated R14-bn on Covid-19 jabs and belatedly filling its warehouses with enough doses to vaccinate the nation” – **Business Day** (7 September 2023).

“Less than 40% of the population has been immunised, the once-integral private sector has been entirely shut out, and SA’s vaccination programme has virtually ground to a halt. Not only does this dismal performance leave SA facing the prospect of having to destroy millions of doses of expired vaccines, but it also poses the genuine risk that the next time health officials ask the Treasury for money for Covid-19 vaccines, they will be shown the door.”