

Mayhem at Charlotte Maxeke Hospital (Joburg Gen) as workers demand performance bonuses

Submitted by [AA](#) [1] on 1 June, 2018 - 21:49

Hospital staff were intimidated and patients had to be locked inside for their safety

By Zoë Postman and GroundUp Staff



Garbage was strewn all over Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital's corridors on Thursday. Photo: Zoë Postman

"They have blocked gates and are burning tyres next to them. Lord help us all. This is so scary, more especially that patients are affected," a health worker messaged from a building at Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital on Thursday.

In the morning hundreds of mostly National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU) members protested both inside and outside the hospital in Parktown.

The workers, mostly nurses, cleaners and porters, demanded that the Gauteng Department of Health

pay their performance bonuses for the 2016/17 financial year.

All the entrances to the hospital were blocked with garbage, dustbins and rocks. The corridors inside the hospital were also filled with garbage including papers and half-eaten food.

A health worker told GroundUp that the “whole hospital was trashed.” There were burning tyres and the protesters closed all the gates, she said. Speaking anonymously, she said that protesters banged on doors and threatened workers who did not participate in the action. She and her colleagues locked themselves in a room but eventually managed to navigate their way to safety. She said patients had to be locked inside the Nuclear Medicine department for their safety. It was “really scary,” she said, and lasted for 45 minutes or more.

A doctor with a close relationship to the hospital informed GroundUp that in one ward patients could not get antibiotics, besides what was still in stock in the ward, because the pharmacy had to be closed.

NEHAWU released a statement that indicated it had no control over the protests. “NEHAWU in the Gauteng Province has been helplessly observing sporadic actions in different facilities of the Gauteng Department of Health ... over the past three days,” the union said. “These actions have led to the intimidation of staff and patients and compromised service delivery.”

NEHAWU blamed the provincial health department for its “lacklustre response” to demands handed to it on 16 March. The union urged the department to pay the bonuses to avoid further disruption of services. It also said the department should immediately engage with staff on the payment of bonuses for the 2017/18 financial year.



[2]

Health workers protested on Thursday, demanding performance bonuses. Photo: Zoë Postman

The Hospital Branch Manager for NEHAWU, Thabiso Maphakula, said that the Department had been stalling the payments since July last year.

“They told us they don’t have money because of the Life Esidimeni saga but we have nothing to do with that. We come here and do our jobs every day so why should we suffer?” said Maphakula.

He said workers should receive performance bonuses every year but the Department “always tampers with that money because they undermine us as workers”.

“In 2009, they didn’t give us even a cent. In 2012, they gave us half and said we would get our other half at a later stage but that never happened ... so now we are saying enough is enough,” said Maphakula.

Maphakula said the protest would continue until a solution was found that the workers were satisfied with.

Health department responds

In a media briefing on Thursday evening, the Gauteng MEC for Health, Dr Gwendoline Ramokgopa, admitted that there were no funds to pay workers’ bonuses last year. But she said there was no justification for “trashing a hospital.”

Ramokgopa thanked health workers and doctors for “continuing to save lives” despite the disruptions. She said there is a meeting on Friday that will discuss the issues that the workers have raised.

Minister of Health Dr Aaron Motsoaledi said the hospital was supposed to complete 50 operations but could only perform 19 due to the disruptions. He said the protesters’ grievances were justified but he condemned the way they handled it.

“This is not a mine where you work with objects. This is a hospital where you work with people and for the patients to be made victim like this is unacceptable,” he said. “You don’t do this to sick people...this is not an act of labour, this is an act of pure hooliganism”.

Earlier this month, the public interest law firm SECTION27 condemned protests in North West Province that endangered patients. “The violence and disruption of healthcare services is leading to immediate loss of life as patients are denied entry to health facilities and doctors and others are prevented from providing care. ... We consider such forms of protest to be grossly irresponsible and morally reprehensible,” the organisation wrote. SECTION27 emphasised that it supported “responsibly conducted protest action” against corruption.

This article was updated after publication with comment by the Department of Health.

Published originally on [GroundUp](#) [3].

© 2018 GroundUp.

[This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](#) [4].

[You may republish this article, so long as you credit the authors and GroundUp, and do not change the text. Please include a link back to the original article.](#)

- Architect Africa Network Search: