Media statement

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Nurse shortages still a thorny and unresolved issue – DENOSA NEC

The Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa’s (DENOSA) National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting over the weekend noted with great concern the remaining status quo of nurse shortages in the country’s health centres and the ineffective HR budgetary management systems in resolving the problem as there are qualified nurses that are ready to start tomorrow.

The NEC held its first meeting for the year in Pretoria, where it deliberated on the country’s state of health following a number of heartbreaking incidents in various healthcare centres, and which were confirmed by the latest audit outcome on public health facilities that was released on the 20\textsuperscript{th} of March. The audit outcome painted a bleak picture on the state of public health service generally.

DENOSA’s concern is that, while acknowledging the 600 medical experts to be contracted by government and deployed in the country’s mostly rural health centres in preparation for the NHI, this is a drop in the ocean given the huge shortage of nurses in South Africa.

What DENOSA finds as a lacking will to resolve nurse shortages at provincial departments is that a many students who have completed nursing and community service long ago are sitting at home, because most provincial departments have not planned and budgeted for their placement in jobs. DENOSA believes this problem can be resolved easily, and calls for the intervention of the national department.

In the Free State, for example, out of close to 350 nurses who completed their community service in 2012, no more than 49 of them were placed in health centres due to budget shortages. At Chris Hani Baragwanath hospital in Gauteng, the shortage of qualified midwives propels management to deploy to maternity sections nurses who are not midwives, which DENOSA has been strongly opposed to. DENOSA finds these to be contradicting the minister of health’s ambitious drive to improve health conditions of the majority citizens.

What compounds the problem is that, as the large population of our nurses is closer to retirement, it takes months to replace those that retire, causing burnouts on the remaining staff as a result of unbearable workload.

With a population of 50 million, South Africa has no more than 245 000 nurses, as per the register of the South African Nursing Council (SANC), which is a figure that may still include people who are no longer practicing as nurses as well as those nurses who now ply their trade overseas. A sizeable chuck of this is also based in the private hospitals that look after 16\% of the population.

With this difficulty in getting a clearer picture on the true extent of nurses shortage in the country, DENOSA embraces the recommendations as enshrined in the recently-launched Nursing Education, Training and Practice Strategy that SANC should revitalise its database to
create a useful tool to strengthen the National Health Information System which will help inform planning for nursing and midwifery services.

Addressing these minor issues will work towards the creation of a conducive and positive practice environment that is supportive of health workers while providing the quality healthcare to members of community.

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