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PROCUREMENT PROCESSES

Department of Health intervenes after KZN inquiry

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The Department of Health is stepping in to buy medical equipment for the KwaZulu-Natal health department, after its investigation into the state of the province's cancer services uncovered deep-seated problems with its procurement processes.

A recent probe by the South African Human Rights Commission found that delays and denial of services put the lives of KwaZulu-Natal's cancer patients at risk and violated their rights.

On Wednesday, Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi told Parliament that his officials had been investigating the sorry state of KwaZulu-Natal's cancer services before the commission published its findings in June. Motsoaledi said the inquiry had concluded that weak human resource management and unwieldy and irrational procurement policies lay at the heart of the problem.

KwaZulu-Natal hospital CEOs had been given the authority to buy goods and services up to the value of R200,000, yet the provincial health department had issued a contradictory instruction that purchases for more than R30,000 had to be gazetted to invite competing bids.

This rendered hospital CEOs' authority to make larger purchases null and void, the minister told Parliament's portfolio committee on health.

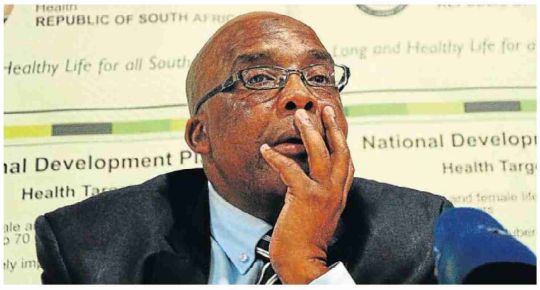
AT ISSUE IS WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR FAILING TO ENSURE ACCELERATORS WERE KEPT IN GOOD WORKING ORDER

To make matters worse, all equipment purchases had to be approved by the Central Technology Unit at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, which did not have the capacity to do the job, Motsoaledi said.

"The health technology unit has failed dismally. It should not be allowed to purchase equipment on behalf of institutions, but rather assist with specifications, monitoring and evaluation," he said.

Motsoaledi said these measures had been agreed to at a meeting last month with KwaZulu-Natal Premier Willies Mchunu, finance MEC Belinda Scott, health MEC Sibongiseni Dhlomo and the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

They agreed that from October 1, central hospital CEOs would have the authority to make purchases of up to R500,000 and that the requirement to seek competing bids for anything above R30,000 would be abolished.



On the mend: Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi says that steps are being taken to tackle equipment issues. /File picture

A forensic audit report on the maintenance contract for the broken cancer machines at Addington Hospital would be presented to the Department of Health on Thursday, Motsoaledi said. At issue is who was responsible for failing to ensure the linear accelerators were kept in good working order, a situation made worse by the overall weak state of the province's cancer services.

Dhlomo told MPs that the provincial health department would deal with the problems identified by the commission, that it was taking steps to repair or replace broken equipment, recruit oncologists, as well as tackle the long waiting periods for treatment.

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