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Oncology crisis: Health's response 'unsatisfactory'

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THE South African Human Rights Commission chair advocate Bongani Majola says the organisation is not satisfied with the KZN Health Department's responses to the oncology crisis.

Majola met the KZN health portfolio committee yesterday afternoon to give a presentation on the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) report on the state of oncology in the province.

The commission released a damning report in June this year.

It found the department had failed its cancer patients by not: maintaining and acquiring functional equipment, providing access to adequate oncology services and monitoring the health needs of oncology patients in the province.

Majola said yesterday that the commission had been unhappy with the department's responses and found them unsatisfactory.

"The matter is so urgent that everything should be done to rectify it. We have had reports on interventions and the training of registrars, but registrar numbers are low."

Majola said that the recommendations made to the department in the report were directives and were binding.

He said if anyone wanted to challenge the directives or believed the directives were not binding they could "go to a court of law".

The directives included producing a time plan to recruit oncologists, fixing broken oncology machines and expanding oncology services to Ngwelezana and Port Shepstone hospitals.

The directive also stated that a public private partnership (PPP) should be put in place.

Majola said he understood that there were issues with resources, but steps should be taken to access funds.

"Our job is not to sit quietly when rights are threatened. It is our job to intervene," said Majola.

The Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA) was also present at the meeting. CANSA's Lorraine Govender and Lisa Strydom said that although there had been investigations and some of the challenges were being addressed, they were still receiving complaints.

Strydom said she felt a PPP would help alleviate the current crisis but it would be a short-term solution.

Majola said there was a PPP programme in Richards Bay that was being monitored to see if it would work on a larger scale.

DA MPL Dr Imran Keeka said at the meeting that very little progress had been made in the three months since the SAHRC report was released.

"Machines have not been fixed and the province currently only has three that are operational — at Inkosi Albert Luthuli and one at Grey's."

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