

# EASTERN CAPE PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE

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Attention: The Minister of Health

Hon Dr Paahla

Re: The use of Komani Psychiatric Hospital wards by Enoch Mgijima municipal officials

I write to you to express my grave concern that no less than three thirty-bedded wards at the Komani Psychiatric Hospital outside eKomani in the Eastern Cape are being used by municipal officials as office space. I discovered this on a recent oversight visit to the facility and the situation has allegedly been ongoing for two years or more.

In light of the fact that our province is in the midst of a full-blown and escalating mental health crisis, where hospitals across the province are inundated with mental health patients seeking specialised care, the fact that wards that collectively can accommodate ninety beds have been sacrificed for administrative use for local government officials is outrageous and completely unacceptable.

Of even graver concern is that the Komani Hospital offers forensic services, which means that many of the patients that are currently admitted in the nearby Frontier Hospital and are waiting to be admitted to Komani Hospital, are criminally insane and the clinical staff there are not qualified to treat them effectively.

Also most concerning is the fact that Komani Hospital still has no fulltime specialist psychiatrist, and is only visited on one day of the week by a psychiatrist from Fort England Hospital in Makhanda. As a result, the observation backlog at Komani Hospital is massive. Seemingly there are no plans afoot to address this backlog, which means patients are held in limbo for months at a time until they are seen again.

Almost none of the recommendations made by the late Professor Mkhize, the Health Ombudsman, in 2018 have been implemented and senior management in the Eastern Cape Department of Health seem incapable of finding solutions.

I therefore humbly propose the following:

1. In order to address the gross violations of mental patients' rights to access the necessary healthcare, the municipal officials must be told to leave the hospital premises with immediate effect, thus freeing up substantially more space for patients.

2. The sixty bed ward which is still incomplete due to non-payment of service providers must be prioritised so that a further sixty beds become available as soon as possible.
3. A psychiatrist from Cecilia Makiwane be instructed to dedicate two days a week to the Komani Hospital, and a psychiatrist from Nelson Mandela Academic Hospital be instructed to dedicate two days per week to Komani Hospital. With the current visiting psychiatrist from Makhanda, there will be a specialist psychiatrist on site daily for five days a week which will go a long way to addressing the massive observation backlog and normalise the situation at the hospital.
4. The budget for this hospital to adjusted accordingly, as currently this facility gets the same Goods and Services budget at the Elizabeth Donkin Hospital in Gqeberha, which has less than half the patient numbers and does not offer forensic services.

I have also written to the South African Human Rights Commission, as I believe that denying psychiatric patients their right to access a facility because local municipal officials need office space, is a gross human rights violation.

I trust that you will receive this letter in the spirit that it is sent – that of striving daily to ensure that we do better for the citizens of our province and country that depend upon government for their wellbeing.

Yours in health for all,

Jane Cowley



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