

Editorial

Is the healthcare sector harbouring bogus nurses?



The healthcare sector in South Africa is still facing numerous challenges varying from critical staff shortages, increasing medical litigation and fraudulent healthcare practitioners. During recent months the Health Professionals Council (HPCSA) again reported bogus medical doctors, not only in the private sector but also in the public sector. The HPCSA has reported that over four hundred bogus practitioners were arrested and one hundred and thirty-eight criminal cases were opened (27 August 2017). It is always frightening if we have to deal with a bogus nurse or healthcare practitioner; it is difficult to understand how they managed to bypass our systems, especially in hospitals where numerous control systems are implemented to ensure that all the health professionals are trained and licensed practitioners. The control systems for nurses seem to be more difficult to side-step if compared to medical and other healthcare professionals.

Are we too relaxed and do we have untrained and unregistered nurses working for us? The annual licensing fee and the verification of the South African Nursing Council (SANC) are but some of the measures we implement to ensure that patients only receive care from qualified and registered nurses. How do

we determine that the SANC receipt is authentic; how do we determine whether the nurse has the experience he/she claims to have? The biggest challenge still lies in the nurses unfamiliar to the hospital, ward or the clinic where we rely on the uniform and the distinguishing devices to guide us. We still have to find a solution that will ensure that only registered and suitably qualified nurses care for our patients. Health professionals registered with the SANC, HPCSA and SAPC (South African Pharmacy Council) are legally bound to exercise "reasonable skill and care" when carrying out their duties and when dealing with clients. The safety of the patients is compromised if they receive treatment and care from practitioners without the necessary knowledge and skill. Patients have the expectation of receiving excellent care and when negative consequences or even loss of life are as a direct result of an act or omission on the part of a healthcare professional, then they are liable for damages.

Patients are more aware of their rights and this is now resulting in a significant increase in malpractice cases in the health sector. Nurses are not exempted from this trend. It is therefore important for nurses to have proper indemnity insurance and not to rely only on the insurance provided by the employer. To be a professional, also implies that you have to take responsibility for all your actions.

The Minister of Health, Dr A Motsoaledi, has appointed Ms Sizo Mchunu as the Registrar and CEO of the South African Nursing Council with effect from 1 October 2017. Ms Mchunu has a difficult task in implementing the new nursing qualifications, but with her knowledge and experience of nursing education we are looking forward to the future developments at the SANC and the nursing profession.

We wish her well with this important responsibility.



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