

ASSA REQUESTS ACTION ON VIOLENCE AGAINST MEDICAL STAFF IN STATE HOSPITALS

The ASSA has expressed its concern, in a letter to T D Mseleku, director-general in the national Department of Health, over violence against junior medical staff in state hospitals, saying that this matter is not being addressed with the urgency it deserves and requesting that tangible efforts be shown to be made for the protection of all health care workers.

While the focus of the communication relates to junior medical staff, the same applies to all levels of employees working in state institutions.

Incidences of which the ASSA is aware include a violent assault on a junior doctor at Dora Nginza Hospital, Port Elizabeth, rape of a medical student at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital, rape of an intern at Pretoria Academic Hospital, at least two attempted rapes at King Edward VIII Hospital, Durban, rape in the doctors' quarters at Port Shepstone Hospital and mugging of a registrar at Groote Schuur Hospital, Cape Town.

The ASSA says it is also particularly concerned that such incidents of violence will add to the negative perception related to a career in medicine in South Africa. This is of particular concern in those specialties such as general surgery, where work is done in unfavourable circumstances and after hours.

In his response Mseleku said the department is fully aware of security problems in health facilities and regards the issue as a major concern. The heads of provincial health departments are also aware of these problems and have engagement at facility level to urgently address the safety of patients and staff.

Mseleku also encouraged the ASSA 'to share (with the department) ways and means of curbing these problems so that we can create an environment that is conducive for health professionals to practise medicine appropriately'.

ASSA ISSUES RESOLUTION AGAINST DISCRIMINATION

The ASSA has issued a resolution against discrimination stating that the Association notes with great concern that multiple well-publicised acts of a racist nature have recently occurred in South Africa. These events have been characterised by their ruthlessness, and the blatant disregard of human dignity and of the ideals enshrined in the South African constitution.

The ASSA is vehemently opposed to any form of discrimination and breaches of individual human rights. It welcomes any actions taken against institutions and individuals who perpetrate discriminatory acts, especially if they are wilfully committed against more vulnerable members of our society.

The ASSA also calls on all South African health care workers to unreservedly condemn such behaviour.

ASSA SPEAKS OUT ON XENOPHOBIA

The ASSA has spoken out on recent attacks against foreign nationals in South Africa, saying that it joins the majority of reasonable South Africans to condemn these in the strongest possible terms. The attacks cannot be viewed as anything less than racist, immoral and brutal criminal acts against fellow Africans.

Foreign nationals contribute significantly to the health care provision in South Africa, both in the public and private sectors. Many of these people provide the only care in some rural

clinics and hospitals where such posts would otherwise be vacant, and where South Africans are reluctant to work. Such criminal acts alienate these colleagues and threaten their wellbeing.

The ASSA calls on the medical fraternity to condemn these acts and asks the authorities to take stern and decisive action against the perpetrators.

The ASSA also notes that as a founder member and active participant of the Pan African Association of Surgeons (PAAS), the recent events involving xenophobia have caused the Association serious embarrassment, and it unreservedly apologises to the PAAS and its members across the African continent for the actions of a few South Africans who threaten all the progress that has been made by the ASSA to integrate and contribute to the African surgical community.

The Association also commits itself to engage with fellow South Africans to support the victims of the recent atrocities and, where possible, prevent this from happening again.

IN MEMORIAM: 'BOET' VAN RENSBURG

It is with great sadness that the ASSA has learned of the death of Professor L C J 'Boet' van Rensburg.

He served the surgical community both from private practice, and then as professor of surgery and head of department at Stellenbosch University. He was widely regarded as a superb surgical technician.

He was a loyal member of the ASSA, serving on its Executive Committee and as its president. His contributions were recognised by the award of an Honorary Life Presidency of the Association.

Condolences go to his wife Elizabeth and family members.

A full obituary is being prepared by Brian Warren.