

## **UPDATE ON NEHAWU STRIKE ACTION AT THE NHLS**

JOHANNESBURG, 02 August 2017 - The National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS) management welcomes the media statement released by NEHAWU on 1 August 2017 indicating the intention of its members to suspend the strike action affecting NHLS laboratories. Although it is unfortunate that this strike has taken place in the first instance despite the efforts of NHLS to avoid it, the resumption of laboratory testing of samples at NHLS laboratories will get underway today, 2 August 2017.

Whilst the contingency plans that were operationalised by the NHLS to provide essential laboratory diagnostics was generally successful, the NHLS nevertheless wishes to extend an apology to the Provincial Health Departments and the general public of South Africa for any inconvenience that the strike action might have caused. Also, the NHLS acknowledges the role played by non-striking NHLS staff and the support from the private sector in ensuring that it was able to deliver a minimal level of service to mitigate against the risk of loss of life. In some provinces, the efforts of a few NHLS staff essentially saw an uninterrupted service being provided.

As with any strike action, the disruption of services does create a backlog, which the NHLS will now redouble its efforts to address. Notably, such backlog is unlikely to have placed patients' lives in jeopardy, since the NHLS continued undertaking emergency tests during the strike action. Due to the nature of laboratory services, some of the tests which might have been done but not yet processed, will need to be repeated to ensure the validity of the results. The NHLS Laboratories and Business Managers will engage with the relevant healthcare providers to address any such backlog.

Although the resolution of the current crisis is a welcome relieve to the NHLS and the Public Health Service in general, the NHLS Management re-iterates its concern with regard to the debt owed to the NHLS, inter alia by Gauteng Province. The NHLS, being a non-profit public entity, derives its sole source of income from Provincial Health Departments for the laboratory services provided. As such, unless significant inroad is made in paying the debt owed to the NHLS, as well as keeping up with current payments for services procured, the Public Health Service potentially faces even a greater threat within the next few months than was witnessed over the past week.

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