

REMARKS BY MINISTER OF HEALTH IN RESPONSE TO THE HEALTH OMBUDS INVESTIGATION REPORT FINDINGS INTO THE INCIDENT INVOLVING MS ZENIZOLE VENA AT MOTHERWELL CLINIC, EASTERN CAPE – 12 DECEMBER 2023

I have read and familiarized myself with the content of the Ombud's preliminary report on this regretful event. It is profoundly sad that a teenage woman has come to the end of her life in this manner. Let me say upfront that the National and Eastern Cape Departments of Health accept the report of the Health Ombud, including the recommendations.

The Office of the Health Ombud is a statutory body, which means its work and recommendations reflect a bearing on the policy, regulations and work we do as the health sector in delivery quality healthcare in the country. It is obligatory on us to reflect and consider its findings and recommendations as it will assist to improve our services.

I have noted from the Ombud's report, a number of negligence conduct pertaining to how Ms Zenizole Vena was treated. Ms Vena received an appalling service which is described as the cause of death and could have been avoided if the nursing staff on duty had acted professionally as required by both the professional ethics conduct and the employer workforce guidelines. These acts constitute the gravious neglect of duty and responsibilities in this health facility, and deserve nothing but the strongest condemnation.

These negligence amongst others pertain to the fact that no file was opened for this patient, the patient was not screened since no vitals signs were recorded, the protocol for how a patient who has been sexually assaulted, in line with the Adult Primary Care Guideline, the APC Guideline, was not followed and the clinic staff failed to appropriately refer the patient to the next level of care. However, it is reported that the staff in question have received training on APC, and it is most disappointing that the APC Guideline was not followed, since if the staff did so, all the above shortcomings would not have occurred.

The APC Guideline has been developed using approved clinical policies and guidelines issued by the National Department of Health and is intended for use by all health care practitioners working at primary care level in South Africa as a clinical decision-making tool. Along with guiding the delivery of sound clinical care, APC aims to uphold key values pertaining to patient care.

According to the APC Guideline the following should have happened, amongst others:

- (i) Clinical symptoms should be attended to including the prevention of hepatitis and sexually transmitted diseases – treat if not severe, refer appropriately if severe.
- (ii) Prevention of pregnancy if patient is not already pregnant.
- (iii) The mental condition should be assessed and managed in line with findings of the assessment.
- (iv) Patient should be comforted and reassured, allowing a trusted friend/relative to stay close.
- (v) A clear record of the patient's story in their own words as well as of vital signs and care given should be completed.

We take seriously, all these negligence and apart from a police investigation, the Eastern Cape Department of Health has already been requested to institute a departmental disciplinary process to ensure those responsible receive appropriate sanctions and the shortcomings that happened are corrected. Salient measures to be undertaken by the Nelson Mandela Bay Health District Office to rectify the situation and improve service delivery are as follows:

- Permanent appointment of staff as the Report recommends.
- Re-training and mentorship of staff on the Norms and Standards Operating procedures of Clinics, Batho-pele principles and Professional nursing code of conduct.
- Improvement of the clinic infrastructure and necessary signage

The National Department and Eastern Cape Provincial Department of Health will monitor and ensure the District Office speedily implements the recommendations from the Ombud's report.

I thank you