

MEDICAL INTERN INDUCTIONS



ADDRESS BY THE EASTERN CAPE HEALTH MEC, HON. NTANDOKAZI CAPA, AT THE INDUCTION SEMINAR FOR FIRST-YEAR MEDICAL INTERNS, FIRST- AND SECOND-YEAR REGISTRARS AND COMMUNITY SERVICE HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

09 JUNE 2026

Programme Directors, Dr V. Mehlo and Mr M. Pinca;

HOD and senior leadership of the Department

Representatives of the National Department of Health;

Representatives of the Health Professions Council of South Africa and professional councils;

Our academic partners from Walter Sisulu University and Nelson Mandela University;

Distinguished clinicians, programme managers and healthcare leaders;

And most importantly, the young women and men who gather here today as our newest medical interns, registrars and community service health professionals;

Good morning.

Two days ago, on 7 June, South Africa and the world observed National Cancer Survivors Day. It reminds us that cancer not only affects the body; it disrupts lives, reshapes families, and leaves emotional scars that are often unseen. Before we proceed, I ask that we observe a moment of silence in memory of all those who have succumbed to cancer and other illnesses, and to honour the millions of survivors whose stories continue to inspire hope and resilience.

Today, as we gather here in kuGompo, we are not merely commencing an orientation programme. We are ushering nearly 300 healthcare professionals into a sacred covenant with society. We welcome approximately 150 first-year medical interns, 50 registrars and 100 community service health professionals who have travelled from every corner of our province. From the rural villages of Alfred Nzo and Joe Gqabi, to the communities of Chris Hani and OR Tambo, from Buffalo City Metro and Amathole to Nelson Mandela Bay and Sarah Baartman, you represent the very diversity and promise of the Eastern Cape.

Some of you trained at Livingstone Hospital, Frere Hospital and Nelson Mandela Academic Hospital. Others have embarked on specialist training across our institutions.

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Many among you are young. Many are black. Many are women. Your presence in this room is itself a testimony to the victories won by generations that came before you.

In seven days, our nation will commemorate fifty years since the historic Soweto Uprising of 1976. Fifty years ago, young people confronted a brutal apartheid system that denied them dignity, opportunity and quality education. They understood that silence in the face of injustice was surrender. They knew that freedom required sacrifice and courage. Some paid the ultimate price so that democracy could be born.

Today, the struggle confronting young people has changed. Political apartheid has fallen, but economic exclusion remains. Unemployment, inequality, poverty, substance abuse, crime, gender-based violence and growing mental health challenges continue to define the daily realities of millions of young South Africans. The youth of 1976 fought for access. Your generation must fight for excellence. The youth of 1976 demanded education. Your generation must transform that education into service. Their battlefield was oppression. Yours is disease, inequality and the unfinished task of building a just healthcare system.

Recently, the department faced criticism regarding its inability to absorb all qualified doctors. While we acknowledge these concerns, we must never lose sight of the bigger picture. The fact that South Africa now produces increasing numbers of young black and women doctors is not a crisis. It is the triumph of democracy. It is evidence that doors once closed have been opened.

Those who marched in 1976 did not envision a South Africa where only a privileged few would become doctors. They envisioned a country where the children of farm workers, domestic workers and ordinary families would one day wear white coats and lead the healing of our people. That dream is alive in this room.

This year also marks 30 years since the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. For 30 years, our Constitution has served as a moral compass, guaranteeing dignity, equality, freedom, and human rights. It reminds us that healthcare is not charity. It is a constitutional right. As a government, we therefore remain committed to building a capable developmental state that delivers quality services and restores the confidence of our people.

One leader who consistently reminds us of what guides our healthcare system is the Minister of Health, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi. He often emphasises that a health system cannot function by accident. It requires deliberate architecture.

The World Health Organisation identifies six building blocks that underpin a functional healthcare system: leadership and governance; service delivery; health financing; the health workforce; medical products and technologies; and health information systems. When one block weakens, the entire system suffers.

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South Africa continues to carry the burden of a deeply unequal two-tier healthcare system. A minority enjoy world-class private healthcare while the majority depend on a public sector that serves the poor, the unemployed, undocumented persons and increasing numbers of citizens who can no longer afford private medical aid.

For this reason, we continue to advocate for National Health Insurance. NHI is fundamentally about social solidarity. It is about equity.

It is about ensuring that healthcare is provided according to need, not wealth. It is about ending the painful reality that quality healthcare remains a privilege for the few.

Long before the phrase "universal health coverage" entered international discourse, pioneers among black doctors in South Africa understood that health and justice are inseparable.

The late Professor Bongani Mayosi documented in his publication, "The first black doctors and their influence in South Africa," how the earliest black doctors shaped not only medicine but also the political destiny of this country.

The historic Three Doctors' Pact, signed by Dr Alfred Xuma, Dr Yusuf Dadoo and Dr G.M. Naicker, laid the foundations for non-racialism and unity in the liberation struggle. Their leadership inspired generations that followed.

Others, like Dr Silas Modiri Molema, fought battles against racial discrimination within healthcare itself. When nurses resigned because he admitted white patients to the hospital, he challenged the injustice in court and prevailed. In many respects, his actions foreshadowed the principle of universal health care.

As Professor Xaba-Mokoena reminds us:

"The basic philosophy of medical education is to raise the standards of healthcare for all people and for medical training to address the needs of the community it serves."

That philosophy remains at the heart of our mission today. But as public servants, we are guided by something even deeper. The Batho Pele principles. People First.

- Consultation.
- Service standards.
- Courtesy.
- Access.
- Information.
- Openness and transparency.
- Redress.

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- Best value.
- Innovation and rewarding excellence.
- Customer impact.

These principles are not bureaucratic slogans. They are a moral contract between the state and the people.

You also enter service at a particularly difficult but important moment in our country's history. Just two days ago, His Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa addressed the nation on migration management and the concerns confronting our country. While acknowledging the need to strengthen border management and enforce immigration laws, the President reminded South Africans that xenophobia and vigilantism have no place in our democracy. The responsibility to enforce the law rests solely with the state. As healthcare professionals, we must remember that illness recognises neither nationality nor language. Compassion knows no borders. We must remain faithful to the values of our Constitution and the humanity that defines South Africa. Our responsibility is to heal, not to divide.

Strengthening healthcare is not only about doctors and specialists. It is also about ensuring that facilities are clean, safe, and dignified. That is why the department is proceeding with the filling of 1000 general worker posts, including cleaners, across healthcare facilities. Because infection prevention starts with cleanliness. No member of the healthcare team is insignificant. From specialists to cleaners, every role matters.

The significance of today's seminar, therefore, cannot be overstated. Its purpose is to strengthen clinical competence, professionalism and ethical conduct. It seeks to reduce malpractice risks and improve patient safety. It seeks to deepen understanding of provincial and national priorities. It seeks to cultivate accountability and teamwork. And it seeks to foster mentorship, peer learning and interdisciplinary collaboration.

East London was deliberately chosen because it stands at the heart of our province and provides equitable access to participants from every district. It allows us to bring together leadership, academia, professional bodies and frontline practitioners under one roof.

As you prepare to take your professional oath and return to your respective hospitals and healthcare facilities, remember that medicine is, above all else, a calling. Long before you became interns, registrars and community service professionals, there were years of sacrifice, sleepless nights, anxious examinations and countless moments when your families and communities invested their hopes in you. You did not arrive here by accident. Society has entrusted you with something sacred: the privilege of standing at the bedside of another human being during their most vulnerable moments. That

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privilege demands competence, humility and unwavering ethical conduct. It demands that you never stop learning, because in medicine, the day one stops learning is the day patients begin to suffer.

There will be difficult days ahead. There will be frustrations with infrastructure, shortages, heavy workloads and moments when emotions run high. There will be occasions when the temptation to become consumed by anger, despair or even industrial action overshadows the reason that brought you into this profession in the first place. Yet, while every worker has rights and every concern deserves to be heard, we must never forget that illness does not pause for protest and suffering does not wait for convenience. Somewhere, at every hour, a mother is in labour, a child is struggling to breathe, a trauma victim is fighting for life, and an elderly patient is waiting for relief. Patients must always come first. That is the essence of our oath and the measure by which history will judge us.

Throughout the day, you will engage with experts on quality clinical care, medico-legal management, rational use of medicines, laboratory investigations, family medicine, maternal and neonatal emergencies, professional ethics, customer care, documentation and research requirements.

These are not merely technical sessions. They are investments in the future of healthcare in the Eastern Cape. As you begin this journey, remember that medicine is more than science.

It is a service. It is a sacrifice. It is empathy. And it is leadership.

And when history writes the story of this generation of healthcare professionals, may it be said that you answered the call.

That you chose compassion over indifference. That you defended ethics over convenience. That you upheld excellence over mediocrity. And that you dedicated your lives to ensuring that the promise contained in our Constitution became a lived reality for the people of South Africa.

Together, let us move the Eastern Cape's health system forward.

I thank you.