

Mr BLOOM: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Question 4: HL004]

"With regard to the extension of the contract with Life Healthcare Esidimeni for psychiatric patients, will the MEC please indicate:

- (i) how much will this cost in rands and cents;
- (ii) what progress has been made in finding NGOs to care for the patients after the three-month extension of the contract;
- (iii) what progress has been made in renovating existing facilities to care for these patients;
- (iv) how many patients currently remain in the care of Life Healthcare Esidimeni; and
- (v) will the MEC consider a further extension of the contract if all patients are not successfully placed after the three months?"

SPEAKER: Honourable MEC.

MEC MAHLANGU: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I think Member Bloom will be very pleased to know that the court has decided this morning that they ruled in the favour of the Department of Health with regard to the matter between SADAG and the Department of Health relating to Life Esidimeni.

Therefore, relating to the costs related to the three months between 1 April and end of June, I cannot give the exact costs because we are not going to keep all the patients in the current number that they are.

As and when patients get ready to be relocated to the new places where they are going to be, that process will happen as it is starting now. So, I am not able to say how much money we are going to pay to Life Esidimeni.

For the record, you will be pleased to know that we are spending far lesser than we have ever spent in Life Esidimeni up until the end of February. So, we will continue to monitor those costs and make sure that patients are still getting the same treatment, but in a different location. So, the 90 days between- of the period you are talking about, we are not going to utilise all of that if things go according to the way we are working now.

Progress we have made with the NGOs: we have activated more than 2 000 beds, including beds that are in the provincial facilities, as we speak now. The NGOs have hired the staff. They have also been given licences. We have [are] also continuously working on the environmental health to inspect their kitchens and all of that. Where deficiencies are found, those are being resolved.

So, we are very confident that the work that with the NGOs and also with what- as with the provincial facilities, that work is going to help us to conclude this process even way before the end of June.

Answer to (iii), all the provincial facilities are almost ready. As I said, the work is going smoothly and we are anticipating no further delays in the process. I want to commit once again: our commitment is to work with all stakeholders: the parents and the families affected but also there must be honesty in the work that we are doing in order to save the patients if indeed all of us have the best interests of the patients we are talking about, who are very vulnerable.

Lastly, how many patients are there? We currently have 1 835. We have moved from 2 300. We are sitting at this number and [on a] weekly basis, we are decreasing those numbers, and it is our desire and interest to make sure the numbers are decreased. By the end of June 2013, we should have no patients at the- 2016, sorry; thank you, Chief - at Life Esidimeni facilities end of that-

The project team is working well. We have got- including the professors who are leading the psychiatry department from all different universities including Tlale, Sterkfontein and Westkopies.

All of them are involved in assessing the patients and be able to indicate to us that this patient is ready to go to this facility, he can be treated at home or he can be treated in whatever.

Remember, Member Bloom, one of the things that we are implementing through this mechanism is to implement the National Health Act about the mental health which says people who have got mental health problems, largely, must be treated at home and must be treated in the comfort and support of their families, and it is important that families must come to the party as well.

Government will do its best where we can and also where people- families cannot support the families, but it is important that families must come to the party and we must all work together to support the patient.

Thank you.

**SPEAKER:** Any supplementary question, Honourable Bloom?

**Mr BLOOM:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. The key figure is that there are still 1 835 patients that are being treated by life healthcare.

Remember, the contract was originally meant to be terminated at the end of this month. We took a great deal of pressure for it to be extended by three months. I hear what the Honourable MEC has to say, that places will be found in the next three months.

Let me just say that I am still very, very concerned. I speak to mental health NGOs, and they tell me that there are no the facilities, [and] that, it simply has not been done.

You have got a huge task if you are going to place 1835 NGOs. I hear you about the court verdict this morning, but just remember this was a contested transfer of 54 patients to Takalani Centre. The court – which is mainly for children actually, and you are putting according to court papers, you know, aged people there including, you know, more than 100 years old.

I am just reading from court papers. Now, you know, obviously the court has made their decision, but I think you are going to have more court challenges. You [have] still got 1835 patients to place within the next three months, and I am very concerned about this whole process.

**SPEAKER:** Honourable MEC, do you want to comment?

**MEC MAHLANGU:** Madam Speaker, I think Member Bloom must be honest that he is

the only one who is concerned.

As ANC Government, when we put the Constitution in place, section 27 of the Constitution guarantees the rights of people being treated for whatever health related problems they have. We cannot therefore, come back and say because people we do not have sufficient budgets, and we want to deliver service differently and sufficiently, we then disregard the Constitution. It will never happen.

I think Member Bloom must also be honest about the work that we are doing. Takalane is not a new NGO. It has been in existence- and the last I was there, the patients at Takalane were ranging from three years old up to 20/30 years old. A 20 year old is not a child

The patient[s] we are bringing there- they are exactly more or less the same intellectual disability of the same people who are at Takalane, so, there is nothing wrong with what we are doing.

The court has found in our favour on the basis of that, because that was a justification of taking us to court on the basis of that. You can go to Takalane, you can go to Little Eden in Edenvale, you [will] find a three year old with a 70 year old, in the same building simply because of the intellectual disability that they have all of the so we will continue to be concerned about where these patients are being taken.

We will continue to be concerned about the environment where the patients are going to be treated, hence we are saying to the NGO, and they have given enough proof of how many professional nurses they have hired, of how many – how our doctors are going to oversee those patients there.

How the psychiatrics students, who are training for psychiatry in Universities, are also going to be linked to those places.

We are doing everything to ensure that they do not get lesser of a services than what they are currently getting and remember Member Bloom, life eSidimni works on a basis of number of patients, and then they get profit on the basis of that and we cannot be held hell bent in staying with this contract irrespective of whether it is affordable or not and I think we must be alive to that reality. Thank you.