

SUNDAY TRIBUNE

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DOG DUMPING

Popular pets prove too hard to handle

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Charting Heather's fall from grace

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SPEAKING OUT

How this 12-year-old sees oppression

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Abortion stigma chaos

- Women forced to bear humiliating conditions
- MEC aware of problem and impact on system

BUKEKA SILEKWA, IZZE SIEMANN and NABEELAH SHAIKH

YOUNG women wanting abortions have resorted to sleeping overnight on the pavement outside Durban's Addington Hospital.

This is not unique to the city, but is part of a countrywide problem where the shoddy treatment of women at public health facilities is driving many to seek backstreet terminations, risking injury and death.

A Roving Reporters-Sunday Tribune investigation has revealed:

- Women have been barred from the hospital's waiting rooms at night.
- Security guards claim the ban was enforced because some were "noisy or stole from other patients".
- The unit treats only 10 women a day on a first come, first served basis and there is no option of making an appointment.

- This limit is not advertised, and often more than 10 women queue overnight, only to learn in the morning they can't be seen.

- There is a shortage of health professionals countrywide who are able and willing to perform termination of pregnancy services at public health care facilities.

- Addington's termination of pregnancy unit was not open on at least one day this week as its nurse was on leave.
- The stigma attached to abortion has resulted in many doctors and nurses refusing to provide such services.

Admitting that "health service delivery times had been compromised", KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health spokesperson Ncumisa Mafunda said the department encouraged "women who might have any pressure to terminate a pregnancy to seek legal Termination of Pregnancy in the right place" through its clinics.

Mafunda provided a list of 42 public health institutions that offered services in the province, including seven in eThekweni.

But the experiences of women seeking terminations at Addington Hospital have raised critical questions about the quality of these services, as well as other issues.

Mafunda said health authorities had been unaware of the plight of pregnant women recently forced to queue overnight outside Addington Hospital to receive attention at its clinic.

"Neither the facility nor the department was aware of such an occurrence until it was brought

to its attention. The department wants to emphasise no health care user has ever been denied access or asked to wait outside its facilities," he said.

As far back as 2015, KZN's Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo acknowledged the plight of women seeking to end their pregnancies and the impact on the health system when things went wrong.

He said in 2014-2015 alone, 20 013 patients were admitted to various health care institutions in the province because of illegal abortion complications, including 1 455 where the women's wounds had turned septic.

He launched an awareness campaign and criticised the prevalence of back street abortion providers' adverts which, he said, made women believe they were a legitimate service. Two-and-a-half years later, not much has changed.

Roving Reporters spent a number of nights outside Addington recently and learnt first-hand how women feared for their safety while sleeping in the queue – on a cement block outside the entrance used by the ambulances.

Waiting

Some had come from outside Durban or from far-flung townships. In many cases their family, friends or boyfriends did not know they were there.

A KwaMashu schoolgirl who cannot be named, said: "I am here... and during the night anything could happen to me and my parents would have no idea."

Asked if an appointment could be made to visit the unit, a security guard said it "worked differently" from the rest of the hospital and advised us to join the queue outside.

The guard said security at the ambulance entrance would keep an eye on us.

On another night, we arrived at 6pm to find we were second in line.

The young woman ahead of us confirmed she was starting a queue for people who had come for an abortion. She said she had already been to the hospital that day – at 4am – but when the unit opened she learnt about the 10-only rule.

On another night, Roving Reporters arrived at 2.15am. We were 12th in the queue.

We asked a security guard why other people awaiting medical attention were allowed into the hospital's waiting room while women wanting

an abortion had to stay outside.

"These women make a noise and disturb the patients and they steal in the hospital," we were told.

Dr Tlaleng Mofokeng, the vice-chairperson of the Sexual and Reproductive Justice Coalition and a member of Global Doctors for Choice, said it was "disgusting" that women awaiting abortions had to sleep on the pavement.

"Can you imagine if that were to happen to those waiting for renal treatment? Why should it be allowed just because these women have been stigmatised?"

Mofokeng said there was no point in the National Department of Health placing adverts on billboards and in newspapers opposing unsafe abortions when it could not provide a safe alternative for women who wanted to end their pregnancies.

"If you go on to the department's website, there is no information about how or where women can go to have abortions. It is appalling that the department wants to talk about unsafe abortions when it cannot provide alternative facilities, resources and options," she said.

Whitney Chinoqwenya, a spokesperson for Mary Stopes South Africa, the country's largest non-profit provider of sexual and reproductive health-care services, said there were multifaceted problems with the department's provision of services.

"There are not a lot of doctors and nurses trained in the procedure.

"There is also conscientious objection – the right of a provider not to give the service based on moral, religious or ethical beliefs," said Chinoqwenya.

"And if a manager has the attitude that he will not provide the service, then all the health care practitioners in that facility will have to adopt that policy, too."

And according to Chinoqwenya, only one public health facility performed abortions in Johannesburg, forcing many women to choose a riskier solution.

"Back street abortion clinics see more clients than Marie Stopes does for a number of reasons, such as pricing and accessibility.

"These illegal providers are mushrooming. You just have to walk along the street in the city and you will see signs on how and where to get a backstreet abortion done," said Chinoqwenya.

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Peterson Crisanto of Brazil won the 2018 Ballito Pro, the 50th edition of the world's longest-running professional surfing event, yesterday. The biggest beach festival on the continent was presented by Billabong and hosted by KwaDukuza. PICTURE: LEON LESTRADE/AFRICAN NEWS AGENCY (ANA)

Mayor mulls personal cost order

KARINDA JAGMOHAN

ETHEKWINI mayor Zandile Gumede may seek to appeal this week's judgment following a court order for her to personally pay the legal costs that the DA incurred last year when it applied to the Durban High Court to prevent her threatening #ZumaMustFall demonstrators.

Mayoral spokesperson Mthunzi Gumede said: "Having studied the judgment, the mayor will consult her legal team with a view to establishing what options may be available to her, including whether to lodge an appeal against the judgment."

Durban High Court Judge Johan Ploos van Amstel dismissed her application to cancel the order to pay the legal fees. The judg-

ment came more than a year after the DA's successful court interdict against Gumede.

Last year, the #ZumaMustFall march, also styled as the "Walk to Save SA", saw thousands converge on the Durban promenade. They chanted for Jacob Zuma to step down as president in the wake of corruption allegations against him.

But in the days leading up to the April 7 mass march, Gumede allegedly threatened that marchers would face arrest.

The mayor allegedly told an SABC journalist the "nasty march" amounted to treason and that all security agencies, including the police, would be out in full force to arrest anyone marching against Zuma.

Gumede denied making these statements, and the SABC

later retracted the story.

But court papers filed last year by the DA's advocate, Natalie Lange, showed that DA MP Haniff Hoosen received phone calls from marchers concerned about apparent imminent arrests. That led the DA to apply for an urgent interdict.

The interdict granted by Judge John Olsen prevented Gumede from threatening or procuring the arrest of participants in the lawful march on April 7 last year.

The judge called on Gumede to show just cause why an order to pay costs should not be made against her.

But when the matter came to court, Gumede's defence team had not filed court papers and did not appear in the Durban High Court, resulting in the order against her.

Gumede appealed against it,

but after a drawn-out court dispute, Judge Ploos van Amstel ruled on Thursday that the evidence in Gumede's affidavit was "sketchy and inadequate".

He dismissed her application with costs.

Lange said the judgment was significant because the mayor was ordered to pay the costs from her own pocket. "She could not simply pass on the cost to taxpayers."

Lange estimated the bill would exceed R80000.



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