



GAUTENG PROVINCE

HEALTH
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MEDIA STATEMENT

THURSDAY, 14 MARCH 2024

GAUTENG HEALTH WORKING TO ADDRESS THE TOXICOLOGY AND HISTOLOGY BACKLOGS

The Gauteng Department of Health (GDoH) would like to assure the public that the reduction of the toxicology and histology cases backlogs within the Gauteng Forensic Pathology Service remains a priority.

The province is currently tackling over 17 000 toxicology cases and over 7000 histology cases with some dating as far as 2007. Although this is a nation-wide challenge, the GDoH has committed to put measures in place to fast-track the addressing of the backlogs.

Toxicology reports give an indication of the type and approximate amount of legal and illegal drugs that are in the deceased's body by measuring how much of the substances is in their blood, urine, or other bodily fluids. Histopathology on the other hand focuses on the diagnosis and study of diseases of the tissues and involves examining tissues and/or cells under a microscope.

The backlogs can be attributed to a combination of factors, including the emergence of foreign drugs that are difficult to trace, an increase in cases involving sudden deaths, suspicion of poisoning among family members in case of unexpected death, the absence of medical histories for certain deceased individuals (this leads to prolonged multiple tests on one body), and the limited availability of private laboratories willing to conduct state toxicology tests and appear as expert witnesses in court.

“We are fully aware of the impact the backlogs have on the families of the deceased, who are seeking closure and facing material trauma due to long delays in finalising estates. We also understand that insurance claims are being affected, we are fast-tracking interventions to resolve this issue,” explains the acting Chief Executive Officer of the Gauteng Forensic Pathology Service, Mr Thembaletu Mpahlaza.

In an effort to find a lasting solution in addressing the toxicology and histology backlogs, the GDoH will continue to engage external private

partners through the public-private partnerships to augment the current capacity to process cases.

The Department has furthermore embarked on a drive to recruit specialist toxicologists to boost capacity of the existing team and enhance the ability to process cases more expeditiously.

The opening of the Garankuwa Forensic Pathology Service Training Room which will contribute towards producing highly skilled people in the field of forensic pathology will lead to the development of histopathologist.

In the first quarter of the new financial year, the long-awaited state-of-the-art Forensic Medical Service facility at Helen Joseph Hospital will open its doors. The structure will make provision for an in-house toxicology laboratory among other laboratories. This will be a major game changer in dealing with the historic backlogs.

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Issued by the Gauteng Department of Health

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