

Charlotte Maxeke Hospital Remains Closed With Patients Left Stranded

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Release date: 19 June 2021

Siphosethu Wezi is a 16-year-old grade 11 learner. He was born with diabetes and as a result he has been collecting his chronic medication at Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital on a regular basis for many years. Wezi currently stays in Orange Farm with his grandmother, but they used to stay in Johannesburg where his mother worked as a domestic worker. When the pandemic started, his grandmother lost her job because of COVID-19 regulations. Since they relocated to Orange farm, Wezi was not able to get a medical transfer. He now has to travel to Johannesburg for his medication every month and sometimes he has to wait for his grandmother to get SASSA grant money in order to have transport money.

On 7 June 2021 Wezi was scheduled to go collect his medication when he was surprised to hear that Charlotte Maxeke (also known as Johannesburg General) was still closed due to a fire that broke out on 16 April. Instead he was told to go to the nearest hospital for further assistance.

“Our government is failing us. We sacrificed by all means to do the right thing [during this pandemic] but they don’t care about us or our lives. When a hospital is closed for whatever the problem, they should not let the patients suffer for the problem,” said Wezi.

“Now I have to go to another hospital or clinic. What am I going to say when I get there because I don’t have my hospital file with me and I don’t know the doctor’s terms [about my health condition]. Everything is written on my medical file which is locked in there [Johannesburg General]”, complained Wezi. “These health facilities should serve the interest of the community not be the battleground of politics,” he concluded.

The hospital was closed more than two months ago after a fire broke out, damaging 40% of the hospital’s intensive care unit. Since 7 May, the Health Department has continually reported that the hospital will be reopened in phases, starting with the sections that were unaffected by the fire, but still the hospital remains closed. At first the date set to reopen at least partially was 10 May, and now some reports suggest the end of July. When asked about the hospital’s reopening on 18 June at a sitting of the Gauteng provincial legislature, Gauteng MEC for Health Nomathemba Mokgethi’s only response was that it would happen “in due course”.

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