

CHWs at Boekenhouthoek Clinic Told to Stay Home While Patients Suffer

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Boekenohouthoek Clinic is in the kwaNdebele region (in Mpumalanga province), which is a rural area, and is under the Thembisile Hani Municipality in Nkangala District.

The clinic in Boekenhouthoek is a small one that opens 8 hours a day. Boekenhouthoek Clinic is a small clinic that helps people who in both ward 24 and ward 27. With the small capacity of the clinic and the shortage of staff, the resident of Boekenhouthoek and surrounding regions face challenges of not getting proper medical help. This is because they come in large numbers but are told to come back the following week as the results only come on a certain day of the week for a certain services.

Boekenhout Clinic offers services like HIV/AIDS testing, antenatal care, chronic medication, and family planning, and more. Among the clinic staff is 3 nurses, 2 data capturers, 2 cleaners and 2 HIV counsellors. It used to have 20 Community Healthcare Workers (CHWs) that assisted in the delivery of the clinic services, but then only 15 CHWs remained, who are still un-contracted (on fixed-term contracts).

But because of the COVID-19 pandemic, these 15 CHWs are now at home because they were told to stay at home by the clinic management. The management claimed that the number of CHWs are too many; that the government won't pay them if they get sick; and that CHWs are not recognised by the government.

This is when and also why some of the un-contracted CHWs in region started campaigning for absorption into the Health Department and permanent employment. Un-contracted CHWs of different regions in Mpumalanga are part of this campaign as they are also tired of signing contracts every year – they want permanency.

Since CHWs are not allowed to assist the clinic the Boekenhouthoek community has had many defaulters (people who are not taking their medication regularly as prescribed), especially elderly people who take medication for hypertension and diabetes. Another big group of defaulters is patients who are on Anti-RetroViral treatment.

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