

Kempton Park Hospital Abandoned For 25 Years.

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On 26 December 1996 the provincial government of Gauteng led by then Health MEC, Amos Masondo, closed the doors to the Kempton Park hospital, east of Johannesburg. The Kempton Park Hospital, being a 350-bed facility, was the largest hospital in the region. It cost just under R30 million to construct and had equipment worth R10 million inside.

The government shut the hospital doors claiming that it was underused and a waste of state money to keep it running. Since the closing of the hospital, there has been a high demand for healthcare in the area which then put pressure on the Tembisa Hospital as the residents of Kempton Park resorted to using the Tembisa Tertiary Hospital.

In a country where healthcare facilities are a massive shortage, it was shortsighted for the government to claim that the hospital was underused, whereas clinics and hospitals in South Africa in general are short of beds and medication. Since the closing of the 350-bed hospital 25 years ago, instead of taking the redeploying the available equipment inside the building, the government decided to lock it all inside, and since then a lot has been stolen and the building vandalised.

The Kempton Park Hospital was also in the spotlight before it was closed when high school dropout “Dr” Andre Esterhuizen pretended to be a paediatrician and worked in the hospital from 1982 to 1992. Dozens of children died under his care. Esterhuizen was charged with culpable homicide, impersonating a doctor, and defrauding patients. In 1992, the fake medical doctor was sentenced to 18 years in prison.

Incidents like this Esterhuizen’s show the level of negligence the government can have when it comes to the healthcare of the working-class communities. Better screening of doctors should have been done before Esterhuizen was hired, after all people’s lives depend on this.

In 2016 the Gauteng Health Department came out to say that it would be demolishing the abandoned “haunted” hospital and build another one so that it can ease the pressure off the Tembisa hospital. To date, this has not happened. Health MEC Nomantu Nkomo-Ralehoko said that the government was planning on demolishing the hospital and rebuilding again, and to this date this has not happened.

The Kempton Park Hospital as it is, is not a building that is in such a bad state that it should be demolished, the government could easily rejuvenate the building that is already standing and get it to function again.

The reopening of this hospital, the biggest one in the region, could bring some sort of relief to the struggling public healthcare system of the region. It would create a number of jobs from its restoration and new functioning. There are many jobs that could be secured by people through such an undertaking.

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