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Khutsong West Clinic fails to provide Personal Protective Equipment for CHWs

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Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is used everyday by healthcare personnel and community healthcare workers (CHWs) to protect themselves when providing care. “PPE helps protect us from potentially infectious patients and other potentially dangerous substances used in health delivery,” said Sarah Mogotsi, a CHW at Khutsong West Clinic.

“PPE shortages at the clinic is currently posing a tremendous challenge to the healthcare system because of the COVID-19 pandemic. We as CHWs are having difficulty accessing the needed PPE,” she said.

“The community healthcare workers are not feeling safe. COVID-19 is a dangerous potentially killer disease,” she continued. “But the Department of Health is not taking the work of the CHWs seriously. We are begging for gloves, masks, scrubs and sanitisers. The facility manager is failing to provide us with protective equipment as CHWs,” she said, angrily.

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) guidelines on legislation governing workplaces in relation to COVID –19, “employers are obligated to provide their workers with PPE needed to keep them safe while performing their duties. The guidelines state that “the types of PPE required during a COVID-19 outbreak will be based on the risk of being infected with SARS-CoV-2 while working and job tasks that may lead to exposure.”

Mogotsi says that despite recent government action of providing some PPEs to some clinics and hospitals, the shortage of personnel and protective equipment is nowhere near resolution. “The problem is both supply and demand,” she said. “The Department of Health needs to prioritise the CHWs, doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers.”

The shortage of PPE will make it harder for CHWs to do their work. In this environment, community healthcare workers worry they might get sick. The general public is also scared of infections, with some CHWs being chased away when recently conducting home visits to screen for coronavirus. “Wearing PPE while working is important to keep us from contracting the disease ourselves.” Mogotsi emphasised.

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