

Public Health Managers Incompetent: Conference

Written by Rudi Prinsloo

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The majority of senior managers in the department of health were political appointees with no managerial experience, experts told an Aids conference in Durban on Tuesday.

“The research we did revealed that between 50 and 60 percent of senior managers have never been exposed to management. They are just employed because of political party affiliation,” Dr Gustaaf Wolvaardt said at a media briefing on the fourth SA Aids Conference.

Wolvaardt is the director of the Foundation for Professional Development, a private institution established by the SA Medical Association in 1997.

The three-day conference, with delegates from 52 countries, started on Tuesday at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli convention centre and was expected to be officially opened by Deputy President Baleka Mbete on the same day.

Health expert professor Hoosen Coovadia said there was a need to stop talking and start dealing with the HI virus which claimed thousands of lives in South Africa every year.

South Africa was experiencing one of the most severe Aids epidemics in the world. At the end of 2007, there were around 5,7 million people living with HIV in South Africa.

“We do not have the infrastructure, the nurses and doctors to roll out our HIV treatment properly. I thought that when we won democracy we would have resources.

“We have more funds compared to other countries but our past has not been good,” Coovadia said.

While concerns were raised about South Africa's failure to effectively deal with the issue of HIV in the past ten years, most delegates were optimistic that there were signs that the country was moving in the right direction.

In the past, delegates said, many government leaders, including the previous Minister of Health Dr Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, were not committed to fighting the HIV pandemic.

Tshabalala-Msimang, who touted garlic, olive oil and beetroot over antiretrovirals, was replaced by Barbara Hogan who was passionate about dealing with HIV hands on.

“Our past has been sad because there was less delivery. I strongly believe that the future now looks good because there is a lot of energy in our people to work together,” said Professor Linda Bekker, chairwoman of the conference.

“There has been signs of movement which makes me believe that we can make a dent in fighting HIV,” said Bekker, who was also CEO of the Desmond Tutu HIV Centre at the Institute

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of Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine at the University of Cape Town.

She said the biggest challenge was to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission and to expand ARV roll out to HIV patients.

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