

## SA State Hospitals In Crisis

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South Africa's state hospitals are in crisis, and will be at risk of collapse if hundreds of unpaid and demoralised doctors flee their shocking working conditions and pay, the Sunday Times reported.

While doctors and health experts blame the shambles on health mismanagement, health minister, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi said: "I would not use the word crisis, I would say very serious challenges."

The state of the country's public health system was revealed this week by doctors who are at loggerheads with the government over their paltry pay. Doctors were preparing to take to the streets on Friday and to also down tools in next month's Confederation Cup soccer showpiece.

Doctors were working up to 36 hour shifts without pay, operating theatres and trauma units were summarily shut down because of a lack of basic supplies and patients were routinely turned away because of a lack of ventilators, beds and medicine.

The situation would deteriorate further if 10 percent to 15 percent of junior and mid-level doctors carry out their threat to quit unless their pay improves.

South Africa currently had just over 18 000 doctors in the public sector, which worked at one doctor to every 3 800 citizens without medical aid.

The World Health Organisation recommended an average ratio of eight doctors to every 10 000 people -- about three times more doctors than South Africa currently has.

Dr Tina Ingratta, a senior doctor at Johannesburg's major hospitals, lists poor management and misallocation of resources among the primary reasons why the health care system is in disarray.

"Besides this, lack of incentives for people working in the health sector is a contributing factor. Government doesn't seem to prioritise our health care system," she said.

Dr Clarence Mini, who headed a committee to test the standards of Gauteng's 33 public hospitals, said only 11 met basic standards when they were first measured in 2005.

Since then, even some of the successful hospitals had dropped their standards, chiefly "owing to staff shortages and management issues".

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