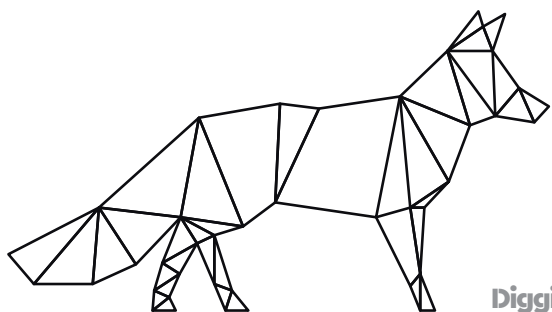




HEALTH CARE

Hospital in the sick bay

It is poised to accept patients, but stands empty while the owner and North West haggle

Chris Bateman

● Plundering by zama zama miners and dysfunctional governance in the North West's department of health have kept a fully functional 295-bed hospital standing idle, says the establishment's owner.

The Duff Scott Hospital, 12km from Klerksdorp in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda district municipality, was once owned by Anglo American but is now privately owned. It has three operating theatres and could provide work for many junior doctors, nurses and health-care workers, says new owner and CEO Anissia Botha. She says she has paid "millions" in security and for repairs.

The North West provincial health department granted the hospital an operating licence in 2016, subject to it becoming operational within six months, but the situation remains deadlocked with provincial authorities not responding to her letters, says Botha.

Botha says it was "practically impossible" to meet the six-month deadline, but the provincial government has not responded to attempts to



negotiate. She says the hospital was forced to rely on parastatals and state-owned companies to repair extensive damage to water and electricity supplies, which took 18 months or longer to fix.

For protection against zamas the hospital had to bring in security at R1.2m a year. Botha says the tens of millions of rand spent on repairing and making the hospital functional could have been avoided had the provincial department granted the hospital a licence in 2014 when it first applied – and before the damage and looting took place.

The plundering and the delay in getting a licence co-

incided with a period of instability and state capture in the province's health department, which was placed under administration in 2018. Department head Thabo Lekalakala was suspended after signing a three-year, R180m mobile clinic contract with Gupta-linked company Mediosa three days after a legal opinion advised him against doing so.

The MEC for health at the time, Magome Masike, described this as a "painful" experience during which he felt "powerless" watching the department deteriorate to the point of collapse amid alleged corruption and tender irregularities.

Botha, a lawyer, became CEO of the hospital after her father, a physician, stepped down. He has since died.

The hospital was bought at

an auction when two Anglo mines closed down in 2016. The province's statutory annual inspections, which had been conducted since 2018, have now suddenly stopped.

"I'm at my wits' end. There are two tertiary state hospitals and two private hospitals in this large district. State posts are scarce and hundreds of doctors are out of work. Our hospital fills a much-needed gap between locally available tertiary care and the other private hospitals. It would also take pressure off hard-pressed state health facilities," Botha says.

She is confident that there are GPs and newly qualified doctors who have completed their community service and are jobless, locally and nationally, who could staff the hospital. Dozens of doctors, nurses and medical staff were re-trenched when the mines shut down.

The hospital was used by the provincial health department for six months during Covid, from June to December



Duff Scott Hospital: Treated 100 patients during Covid

2021, to treat 100 patients.

"The province came to us and we readily agreed to a six-month contract," says Botha. "They provided the doctors and we sourced our own nurses and support staff. It really helped to deal with the pandemic here."

Botha says a three-year hospital operating licence would enable her to get a full complement of staff in place "to service patients optimally and alleviate the problems related to the access to health care in the Klerksdorp, Orkney, Stilfontein and Hartbeesfontein area. It would also provide a base of operations for newly qualified doctors."

Motsamai Moloi, head of licensing for the North West health department, tells the FM that the Duff Scott Hospital's operating licence application is scheduled for adjudication on July 12.

Department chief Obakeng Mongale says the Dr Kenneth Kaunda district municipality is due to table "concerns the committee [wants it] to attend to" at the July 12 meeting, whereupon the licence "should in all likelihood be issued".

Another state-run hospital, at Gelukspan in North West, has been mired in controversy after late-paid contractors destroyed a kitchen, a laundry, a mortuary and a theatre block and then refused to continue work. It was dubbed "the hospital of death" by some patients, staff told News24. However, provincial health spokesperson Tebogo Lekgethwane says maternal mortality has been reduced from 161 per 100,000 patients to zero.

Lekgethwane says the Gelukspan hospital is 65% occupied and shares a kitchen with a nearby school. ✕

The hospital was bought at an auction when two Anglo mines closed down in 2016

ANOTHER WEEK



Gallo Images/Alet Pretorius

SONGBIRD Zoë Modiga performs on stage in Makhanda (Grahamstown) during the National Arts Festival. The jazz, soul and spiritual singer sang parts of her album 'Nomthandazo'. The annual arts festival is in its 50th year

BY THE NUMBERS

THE OLDEST & YOUNGEST COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD

World

31



†The median age is a single indicator of the age distribution of a population — where half the population is older and half is younger than the listed age.

Monaco and Japan — two countries with high life expectancies and low birth rates — have some of the highest median ages (50+). Many countries in Africa have lower life expectancies and higher birth rates. SA's is 30.

* French overseas territories. ** Special administrative region. Based on 2024 estimates, figures rounded. Source: CIA World Factbook