



TREATMENT ACTION CAMPAIGN
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(Treasurer)

Vuyiseka Dubula-Majola

Jane Barrett

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Eric Goemaere

Thembeke Gwagwa

Moray Hathorn

Mark Heywood



MEMORANDUM ON MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH

Why are our babies dying and being born with disabilities?

The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) is a Human Rights organization that advocates for the rights of people living with and affected by HIV and tuberculosis (TB). We have a particular interest in the health of mothers and their babies – given that many of our members are mothers who make use of the public healthcare system.

As many as 800 women die every day globally due to complications related to pregnancy or childbirth. The high number of maternal deaths in some areas of the world reflects inequities in access to health services, and highlights the gap between rich and poor. Almost all maternal deaths (99%) occur in developing countries. More than half of these deaths occur in sub-Saharan Africa and almost one third occur in South Asia¹. South Africa is an upper middle-income country that is achieving low-income country success when it comes to maternal health. According to World Health Organisation (WHO) statistics, South Africa shares a position in the top forty worst maternal health countries in the world, with countries such as Ethiopia, Haiti, Liberia and Niger.

We have unfortunately in recent months become aware of what appears to be serious problems in maternity and obstetrics units (MOUs) in the Western Cape provincial healthcare system. Given the seriousness and the volume of cases recently reported to TAC, we are compelled to intervene. Some of the horror stories shared with us include a mother not being made aware for three days that her child has died and a case where delays at a MOU likely led to a child being born with serious disabilities. We are willing to share details of a number of these recent cases with the Western Cape Department of Health.

As a result of these cases activists from the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), affected mothers, and many local community members and organizations across the Western Cape, are marching to the Provincial Parliament to demand urgent action to address the on-going problems in accessing quality maternal and obstetric care services in the province.

Such urgent action must include a Department of Health investigation into the state of maternity and obstetrics services provided in the public sector in the province. The outcomes of such an investigation must be made public. We are willing to participate fully in such an investigation.

We cannot however wait for an investigation to conclude before acting on a number of urgent issues. From the various cases reported to us, and based on a deliberations at a public meeting of mothers in Khayelitsha, we have identified the following issues that require urgent intervention:

1. Steps must be taken to ensure that all MOUs have sufficient space in their waiting room areas. In these waiting room areas mothers must be monitored closely by a professional health care worker. We believe that these two measures will decrease the number of babies that will be born outside of MOUs.
2. Urgent steps must be taken to improve the quality of the education and counselling sessions preparing mothers for pregnancy, childbirth and beyond. Many of the mothers we spoke to did not receive proper counselling.
3. We demand an urgent increase in the number of professional health care workers who are placed in MOUs, especially doctors. The shortage of doctors causes delays in the referrals of



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mothers to tertiary health facilities. Such delays can have serious consequences for mothers and their babies.

4. A system must be implemented that will promote early bookings and early diagnostics to avoid mothers giving birth at home.
5. Steps must be taken to ensure the availability of the BCG tuberculosis vaccine at health facilities. Where the vaccine is not available, women must be properly and accurately informed about their options and the potential impact on their infants. Failure to properly inform women can lead to significant anxiety and fear.
6. Steps must be taken to ensure women are treated with dignity and respect at all health facilities across the province. Many of the cases reported to us involve serious infringements on the dignity of pregnant mothers.

We request that the office of the MEC for Health responds in detail to the TAC within ten (10) working days of receipt of this memorandum.

Date: _____

SIGNED:

ON BEHALF OF TAC WESTERN CAPE:

ON BEHALF OF MEC OF HEALTH:

