



PsySSA Statement on the The Life Esidimeni Arbitration Hearings

Position Statement

With the rest of the nation, PsySSA follows the Life Esidimeni arbitration hearings with great interest. Considering the death toll is now believed to be over 140 and some patients still unaccounted for, these are indeed sad days in our country. At the same time it is gratifying to know that the hearings are making inroads in uncovering the truths behind one of the worst disasters in the country's health care system. While the hearings will not undo the tragedy they will go some ways toward providing closure and hopefully redress for the families of those who lost their lives.

PsySSA was one of the organisations that wrote to the then MEC requesting a rethink of the plan to transfer the patients before the deaths occurred ([click here to open link](#)). We hope that out of this tragedy will emerge a greater respect for the mentally ill and a better informed understanding of the medical and psychosocial needs of this highly vulnerable group. As a professional society concerned with mental health, PsySSA has long been lobbying for greater resources to be devoted to this area of care.

We are pleased that the various parties involved in the tragedy are being compelled to testify. As psychology professionals, it gives us comfort watching former Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke preside over the hearings. His compassion and empathy for loved ones and family members, and his firm but fair approach to those implicated in the debacle is heartening, and makes us wish we had more such senior figures in our country. Those who attended the 2013 PsySSA Congress in Durban will recall the wonderful address given by Justice Moseneke when he conferred the Steve Biko Award posthumously on Frantz Fanon.

At this juncture PsySSA believes it important to note the role of the media, especially the independent media houses, in facilitating the public's ability to witness the hearings first-hand. Let us also not forget that it was the media, who first alerted the nation to the tragedy that was to unfold following the transfer of the Esidimeni patients. We often fail to recognize and acknowledge how fortunate we are in post-apartheid South Africa to have the type of media freedom that enables our constant awareness of social injustices affecting citizens, from personal and human tragedies to widespread concerns about corruption.

PsySSA looks forward to the conclusion of the hearings with the hope that, among other outcomes, they will provide the much needed impetus for improving mental health care in our country and all over the world.

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