

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

FOR WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION NO. 3549

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(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 23)

Ms J A Basson (PA) to ask the Minister of Health:

What (a) is the position of his department on concerns that the majority of doctors employed in both public and private healthcare facilities appear to be foreign nationals, while many qualified South African doctors struggle to secure employment opportunities and (b) steps have been taken by his department to ensure that suitably qualified South African medical professionals are prioritised for employment within the Republic?

NW3748E

REPLY:

- (a) The Department of Health acknowledges the concerns raised regarding unemployed doctors across the country. However, the Honourable Member is invited to share information supporting her statement that “majority of doctors employed in both public and private healthcare facilities appear to be foreign nationals” as there was never such distribution in the history of South African health systems.

Previously, foreign national medical practitioners were considered only where suitably qualified South African citizens or Permanent Residents are unavailable to fill funded vacant posts, with rural and underserved areas being the beneficiaries. The long-standing Government-to-Government bilateral agreement between South Africa and Cuba has significantly reduced its numbers with only 141 Cuban Medical Practitioners distributed across the country. The department acknowledges that foreign national healthcare professionals have historically contributed to maintaining essential health services but dispute the narrative that they were/are in majority.

On the contrary the department together with Department of Home Affairs reviewed the critical skills list to include only Medical Specialists as scarce skills, as opposed to the past when Medical General Practitioners were included as part of the scarce skill health workforce.

To help the Honourable Member further, table below reflects Medical Officer appointments for 2026:

PERSAL data as of May 2026 (Appointments from Jan 2026 until May 2026)						
Citizenship	Medical Officer (Community Service)	Medical Officer (Intern)	Medical Officer Grade 1	Medical Officer Grade 2	Medical Officer Grade 3	Grand Total
South African citizens	1804	2005	1608	59	102	5578
Permanent Residents	45	47	30	4	12	138
* Other (PERSAL system generated ID)	0	0	17	8	31	56

Total	1849	2052	1655	71	145	5772
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**Other - PERSAL does not provide breakdown to indicate PR or Non-SA status (System Generated IDs)*

(b) The Department has implemented several measures to ensure that suitably qualified South African medical professionals are prioritised for employment within the Republic. These include:

1. Prioritising the placement of South African citizens and permanent residents during the Internship and Community Service placement processes managed through the Internship and Community Service Programme (ICSP);
2. Allocating available funded medical officer posts, where possible, to South African-qualified medical practitioners who have successfully completed their statutory Community Service obligations;
3. Applying the principle that foreign national applicants for internship and Community Service placement are only considered after all eligible South African citizens and permanent residents have been accommodated, subject to the availability of resources and posts;
4. Engaging with provincial departments of health and relevant stakeholders to identify opportunities for the creation and funding of additional medical officer posts to improve the absorption of South African-qualified doctors into the public health system; and
5. Continuously reviewing health workforce planning strategies to align the production of healthcare professionals with the projected needs and fiscal capacity of the public health sector.
6. Recruitment of Foreign national medical specialist is the last resort following clearly demonstrable unsuccessful multiple efforts of recruitment including interactions with the Specialists Interests Groups and College of Medicine for access to South African specialists.

The Department remains committed to strengthening the health workforce, promoting employment opportunities for South African Health Care Professionals (HCPs), and ensuring equitable access to quality healthcare services across the country.

END.