

NCOP

FOR WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION NO. 5

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Ms M Makesini (Free State: EFF) to ask the Minister of Health:

(a) What is the current national status of oncology services within the public healthcare system as South Africa loses more than 60 000 lives to cancer annually, (b) how many patients are currently on oncology waiting lists at each public hospital, (c) what specific and time-bound steps have been taken to address the reported (i) critical oncology staff shortages, (ii) non-functional medical equipment and (iii) extensive treatment backlogs in this regard and (d) what immediate measures are in place to prevent avoidable deaths for patients who have already been diagnosed, yet remain untreated as a result of the said institutional backlogs?

CW05E

REPLY:

(a) The following table reflects the details in this regard.

Province	Hospital	Human Resources	Equipment
Eastern Cape	Nelson Mandela Academic Hospital	Oncologist x 2 Radiation therapist x 3	Laminar Flow 2X Linear accelerator (to be purchased) Brachy therapy unit: to be purchased
	Livingstone Hospital	Medical Physicist X 1 Assistant Manager Physicist X 1 Nuclear Medicine Radiographer X 1 Chief Mammography Radiographer X 1 Chief Radiation Oncology Radiographer X 1 Occupational therapist X 1 Assistant Director Oncology & Nuclear Medicine X 1 Chief Radiation Oncology X1	2X Linear accelerator Brachy therapy unit x1 CT Scanner x1
	Frere Hospital	Radiotherapists x1 Medical Physicist x1 Medical Specialist x1	2X Linear accelerator Brachy therapy unit x1 CT Scanner x1
Gauteng	Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital	Oncologists x 15 Nuclear Med Specialists x 9 Nuclear Med Registrars x 6 Nuclear Med MO x 2 Radiation therapists x 101	2 x linear accelerators (not installed)
	Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital		1 x linear accelerator (not installed)
	Steve Biko Academic Hospital		5 x linear accelerators 2 x brachytherapy units 1 x PET scanner 3 x gamma cameras
	Charlotte Maxeke Hospital		4 x linear accelerators 2 x linear accelerators (currently on purchase) 2 x brachytherapy units 1 x PET scanner 2 x gamma cameras
	Helen Joseph		CT Simulator x1
			CT Scanner x1

Province	Hospital	Human Resources	Equipment
KwaZulu Natal	Tembisa Hospital		
	Kalafong Hospital		MRI Scanner x1
	IALCH (working as a complex with Addington Hosp.)	Oncologists x 5 Nuclear Medicine specialist x 4 Medical Physicist x 4 Radiation Therapists x 17 Medical officers x 6	Linear accelerator x3 Brachytherapy: x1 PET Scan:x1 Gamma camera: x 1 Laminar Flow: x1 CT Scanner: x1
	Addington Hospital (working as a complex with IALCH)	Medical Physicist x 2 Radiation Therapists x 9	Linear accelerator x2 Brachytherapy: x1 Laminar Flow: x1 CT Scanner x1 Gamma camera: x 1
	Greys Hospital	Oncologists x 3 Medical Physicist x 3 Radiation Therapists x 16 Medical officers x 7 Registrars x 3	Linear accelerator x2 Brachytherapy: x1 Laminar Flow: x1 CT Scanner x1
	Ngwelezana Hospital	Oncologists x 1 (full time & 1 x sessional) Medical Officers: x 4	Chemotherapy suite Laminar Flow: x1 CT scan: x 1
	Victoria Mxenge (King Edward) Hospital	Nuclear Medicine specialists x1 Medical Officer x1	Laminar Flow: x1 SPECT/CT gamma x 1
Limpopo	Pietersburg Tertiary Hospital	Oncologists x 3 Nuclear Specialist x 2 Oncology Registrars x 5 Nuclear Registrars x 1 Radiation Therapist: 6 Nuclear Medicine Radiographers x 3 Medical Physicist x 5	Linear Accelerators x2 PET Scanner x1 CT Simulator x 1 Brachytherapy x 1 Bone Density Scan x 1 Gamma Camera x 1
Mpumalanga	Rob Ferreira Tertiary Hospital	Oncologists: 2	Laminar Flow unit
Northern Cape	Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe (Kimberely) Hospital	1x Oncologist (assisted by 8 medical officers), Registrar x1(expected to complete in 2027) (Radiation Therapy is outsourced)	Laminar Flow x 1, CT Simulator (to be procured April 2026). (Radiation Therapy is outsourced)
North West	Klerksdorp-Tshepong Hospital Job Shimankana Tabane Hospital	Oncologists x 2 Nuclear Medicine Specialist x 1 Medical officers x 4 Radiation therapists x 7	Brachytherapy unit x 1 Linear accelerator x 2 Laminar flow x 1
Free state	Universitas Academic hospital and Annex	Oncologists x 4 MO Oncology x 2 Radiation therapy radiographers x 17 Medical Physicists x 5 Nuclear Medicine Specialist x 3, Medical physicists x 3 Nuclear Medicine Radiographers x 4 Nuclear Medicine Radiographers x 9	Linear accelerator x 2(1 to be procured April 2026) CT Simulators x 1 (MRI Simulator x1 to be purchased April 2026) Brachytherapy x 1 (another to be purchased April 2026) Laminar flow cabinet PET x 1 Gamma camera X3, (1 to be purchased April 2026)
Western Cape	Tygerberg Hospital (TBH)	4 Medical Officers 4 Oncologists 1 Head of Clinical Unit 1 Head of Department 5 Nuclear Medicine Specialists	3 x Linacs 2 x Gamma cameras 1 PET scanner

Province	Hospital	Human Resources	Equipment
		10 Nuclear Medicine Radiographers	
	Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital (RXH)	Nuclear Medicine Specialist: 1 Paediatric Oncologist: 3 PO Fellows: 1 (vacant due to austerity) Paediatric Registrar: 1 PO MO: 1 (sessions) 2 Nuclear Medicine Radiographers	1 x Gamma Camera
	Groote Schuur Hospital (GSH)	9 Oncologists 7 Medical Physicists 33 Radiation Therapists 2 Nuclear Medicine Specialists 7 Nuclear Medicine Radiographers	4 x linear accelerators (1 linear accelerator at end of life and no longer operational) 1 x Brachytherapy unit 2 x planning CT scans (1 at end of life) 3 x gamma cameras 1 x PET scanner

- (b) Oncology services are currently provided in three different ways: Medical oncology, also known as Chemo therapy, radiation therapy and surgical interventions. It must be noted that from April 2025 to December 2025, two hundred seventy-six thousand (276 000) patients received medical oncology services, and three hundred sixteen thousand (316 000) patients received radiation therapy treatment nationally. With that being said, the table below indicates the current backlogs, and the data is not per hospital but rather aggregated per province. Nationally, there is currently a backlog of five thousand and seventeen cases (5017), and the provincial breakdown is indicated in the table below:

Total number of backlogs as of 21 February 2026 per province										
Type of service	EC	GP	KZN	LP	MP	NC	NW	FS	WC	Total
Medical Oncology	*1131	98	753	32	0	0	0	*480	0	883
Radiation oncology		476	511	35	35	175	0		471	3314
Surgical oncology		262	124	129	20	235	50		0	820
Total	1131	836	1388	196	55	410	50	480	417	5017

***Free State and Eastern Cape provinces:** do not separate medical, radiation oncology and surgical backlog numbers.

- (c) (i) To address provincial oncology staffing shortages, several measures have been implemented. Recruitment for oncology specialists, medical physicists, and radiotherapists has been prioritized, with posts advertised within available budget constraints. In provinces with persistent recruitment challenges, head-hunting strategies are being utilized.

The Registrar Programme in Mpumalanga Province has also been strengthened. Two Medical Officers have been in Radiation Oncology training since 2024, while two others have completed their training and are awaiting HPCSA registration. These officers have been placed at Witbank and Rob Ferreira Tertiary Hospitals as of 2 January 2026.

Additionally, oncology nurses are receiving specialized training to support retention within the public sector. In some provinces, radiation therapy services are partially outsourced to the private sector to supplement capacity.

(ii)

Province	State of oncology equipment in provinces
Eastern Cape	All oncology equipment is functional. The equipment at Nelson Mandela Academic Hospital will be procured in the financial year 2026/27
Free State	All oncology equipment is functional
*Gauteng	All oncology equipment is functional
KwaZulu Natal	All oncology equipment is functional
Limpopo	All oncology equipment is functional
Mpumalanga	All oncology equipment is functional
Northern Cape	All oncology equipment is functional
Northwest	All oncology equipment is functional
Western Cape	1 linear accelerator at end of life and no longer operational 1 x planning CT scan end of life Procurement of these machines is underway

*** In Gauteng, 3 x linear accelerators have been procured but not yet installed**

(iii) To address oncology service backlogs, several measures have been implemented. Facilities have increased overtime capacity to expand treatment sessions, and temporary wards have been opened to mitigate bed shortages for patients requiring radiation therapy. Patient redistribution between facilities with available capacity is routinely undertaken. Surgical oncology throughput has been increased through extended theatre lists and, where necessary, partnerships with the private sector. Provinces also conduct weekend surgical “blitz” sessions, with clinical teams compensated for additional hours.

The National Department of Health has further introduced an oncology conditional grant supporting service development in the Eastern Cape (Nelson Mandela Central Academic Hospital), Northern Cape (Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe Hospital), Mpumalanga (Rob Ferreira Hospital), KwaZulu-Natal (Ngwelezane Hospital) and Gauteng (Nelson Mandela Children’s Hospital).

(d) Radiotherapy remains the primary source of oncology treatment backlogs, with delays occurring between diagnosis and planning, or between planning and treatment. During these intervals, oncologists implement bridging treatment interventions such as chemotherapy or hormonal therapy to prevent disease progression. High-dose, short-course radiotherapy schedules are used where clinically appropriate to optimize machine time and increase patient throughput. Patients are also decentralized to regional hospitals for chemotherapy after assessment at central or tertiary facilities. Furthermore, facilities are extending radiographer coverage to 24-hour availability and continuing weekend “blitz” sessions to accelerate treatment delivery.

Despite delays, all new and existing patients are monitored according to clinical protocols.

END.