

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction:

South Africa's health system faces the most intricate human resource demands, which are also characteristic of health systems in many other countries. Ensuring an adequate human resource pool for the staffing of the public health sector in particular is a major task that is complicated by the burden of many global disease challenges. Even though the private health sector is not experiencing the same pressures to the same degree, maldistribution within this sector is a serious issue. The human resource demands are an integral part of the challenges confronting the national health system. In this context developing a National Human Resource Plan to address these matters must be seen as one of the steps government is taking to strengthen the entire health system.

It is globally recognised that a focused human resource strategy backed up by an appropriate implementation plan is a critical ingredient of positive change in health care. Success in this area helps to create a positive image and an environment conducive for health care to flourish. The equity, efficiency and effectiveness of the health system depend on the two elements of a visionary strategy and a focused plan being appropriately developed and implemented.

Context:

Both the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and the National Health Act Number 61 of 2003 mandate the National Department of Health to ensure delivery of health services to the South African society. This signifies ensuring the provision of adequate human resources to enable the health system to deliver on that mandate. At the national health summit held on 2 – 3 December 2004 the Department of Health committed itself to developing a strategic framework to serve as a basis for a long-term national human resource plan. The consultation process had started in November 2004 and the strategic framework was presented to all stakeholders during August 2005, with the expectation that they would contribute positively to the process.

The process of conceptualisation started with a review of the work that had previously been carried out in an attempt to address the human resource challenges to health. Central to this approach was a rapid appraisal of the work done by a task team led by Professor William Pick and gathering the views of a number of people who had provided input to that process. The report of this task team (2001) in its introduction stated: *“In order to give expression to the Primary Health Care (PHC) approach, the vehicle through which basic health care will be made accessible to all, the Department is committed to ensuring, through proper planning, that a continuous supply of, suitably qualified, competent human resources will be available to staff primary, secondary and tertiary health facilities”*.

In addition to the legislative and constitutional mandate to provide good quality health services to the nation, the 2001 National Human Resource Strategy provided the context for developing a human resource plan.

Approach to Developing the HRH Plan

The Department's Drafting Team used the WHO HR Toolkit (2004) as a basis for drafting an initial framework. The framework was drafted in a format that would make it easy to modify into a Plan after the necessary consultations with stakeholders had been undertaken. The framework document was therefore constructed in such a way that it already took the form of a national human resource plan. The purpose of this National Human Resource Plan for Health is to guide the development of Provincial HR plans and also to serve as a reference point for the private health sector. It is furthermore intended to guide education and training institutions in the production of human resources for the national health system.

Initial consultation proved very useful in broadly scoping the work and identifying the initial gaps that needed to be addressed. Many stakeholders made available some information that was also used in crafting the strategic framework.

Underpinning this Plan is a set of core guiding principles representing the commitment of government to ensuring that the national health system possesses the necessary human capital to deliver health to the nation.

Core Guiding Principles

Principle 1: Stewardship for health care lies with the National Department of Health

The Bill of Rights, supported by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, declares healthcare as a basic human right. It is therefore the responsibility of government to ensure that all citizens enjoy access to healthcare services. To optimise this right, the National Department of Health commits itself to providing effective stewardship for the national health system.

Principle 2: South Africans must enjoy a reliable supply of skilled and competent health professionals for self-sufficiency

Over the years the production of health professionals in this country has either declined, remained static or increased marginally. Overall, this output has not kept up with the demand for supplying health professionals, made more pressing by the increasing burden of disease. The National Department of Health in partnership with other government departments like the Department of Education and National Treasury has committed itself to finding ways of increasing the production of health professionals in sufficient numbers to ensure a reliable supply for the national health system. On their part, the education and training institutions have committed themselves to providing South Africans with skilled and competent health professionals.

Principle 3: Planning and development of human resources linked to the needs and demands of the health system must be strengthened

The National Health System undertakes to plan and develop human capital strategies linked to the needs of recipient communities. This demands the establishment of health information systems that cut across the public / private divide. Both sectors therefore pledge themselves to invest in systems that will enable the country to address more accurately the needs of South Africans. The Department of Health must ensure that it has the technical expertise necessary to lead health workforce planning.

Principle 4: The optimal balance, equitable distribution and use of skilled health professionals to promote access to health services must be developed

South Africans who inhabit rural areas have their access to health services compromised by the poor availability of skilled health professionals at the health facilities closest to them. The Department of Health commits itself to working continuously to provide skilled health professionals and/or to ensure effective referral systems to promote such access.

Principle 5: Health workers must have the capacity and appropriate skills to render accessible, appropriate and high quality care at all levels

Human beings, like any other creatures, do not choose when and how to fall sick. Only health professionals are armed with the knowledge and skills to alleviate or cure illnesses and diseases. The skills and knowledge possessed by professionals are however not enough to ensure high quality health care. Values and ethical conduct are also vital qualities that health professionals must possess. Health professional associations and organisations therefore should take the responsibility of ensuring that their members adhere to a value system that places the patients' needs uppermost.

Principle 6: Work environments must be conducive to good management practice in order to maximise the potential for the health workforce to deliver good quality health services

The democratic government inherited poorly planned health facilities and most were in unsatisfactory states of preservation. These now pose a serious challenge in terms of the environment that health professionals demand. The department pledges to work hard to improve the physical and management environment of these facilities so that they are conducive to the services of the health workforce. The department will ensure that, starting in 2006, it will offer high quality management training sessions designed to improve management in its facilities.

Principle 7: South Africa's role in international health issues contributing to leadership, scientific advances and global health professions is critical

The national health system (public and private) will continue to contribute positively to global health leadership and scientific advances. Both sectors therefore commit themselves to sharing information, resources and the like to ensure that South Africa fulfils this role by providing visionary leadership and partnership based on trust.

Principle 8: South Africa's contribution, in the short to medium term, to the global health market must be managed in such a way that it contributes to the skills development of health professionals

South African health professionals are recruited by a number of health systems internationally. This, in the short term, has resulted in a decrease in such human resources in their country of birth. The Department of Health interacts with other countries through various government-to-government agreements, and multilateral organisation-sponsored protocols like the Commonwealth Ethical Recruitment Protocol. The department therefore commits itself to ensuring better management of the exchange or migration of health professionals without compromising the constitutional rights of South Africans to choose where to work.

Principle 9: Mobilization of funding to ensure successful implementation of the Plan

The National Health System must be adequately resourced to ensure that health workers have the necessary tools and knowledge to provide health services to South Africans. The private health sector must find a role to play utilising various instruments like the Health Sector Charter.

Principle 10: The Department of Health must ensure that it has the technical expertise necessary to lead health workforce planning

South Africa must possess advanced expertise and technical skills in order to plan, research and manage health workforce planning. This expertise must be supported and funded also by the private health sector through appropriate mechanism that enhance the private sector's responsibility for the development of human resources for health at certain levels.

Summary of Strategic Objectives associated with Guiding Principles for the National Human Resource Plan

Guiding Principle	Strategic Objective
<p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>Stewardship for Health Care lies with the National Department of Health</p>	Provision of leadership through guidance of the Public and the Private Health Sectors
	Defining a vision and developing an overarching National Human Resource Plan
	Establishing shared values and a shared base with provinces regarding issues of HR planning, management and development
	Establishment of reliable monitoring and evaluation systems
	High level investment and resource allocation decisions
	Management of regulatory environment and oversight function
	Development of partnerships spanning all formations in the health sector
<p style="text-align: center;">2</p> <p>South Africans must enjoy a reliable supply of skilled and competent health professionals for self-sufficiency</p>	Ensuring regular and up-to-date projection of national, regional and local HR needs in line with identified priorities
	Setting up mechanisms and structures for the periodic/regular projection of health worker needs and subsequent adjustment of plans
<p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>Planning and development of human resources linked to the needs and demands of the health system must be strengthened</p>	Application of HRH research and knowledge to advance the health system as a whole
	Alignment of training and education resources to the health system's needs
<p style="text-align: center;">4</p> <p>The optimal balance, equitable distribution and use of skilled health professionals to promote access to health services must be developed</p>	Provision of human resources to render adequate, accessible and appropriate services in rural and other under-serviced areas
	Development of incentive systems for health service provision in under-serviced areas
	Balancing health worker categories, aligning and synergising scopes of practice across the professions

Guiding Principle	Strategic Objective
<p>5 Health workers must have the capacity and skills to render accessible, appropriate and high quality care at all levels</p>	<p>Provision of initial and continuing education and training that meets the identified health needs of the country by training institutions</p> <p>Provision of high quality and appropriate experiential learning</p> <p>Establishment of skills monitoring and assessment systems</p> <p>Promotion of life-long learning and research-based practice among all health workers</p>
<p>6 Work environments should be conducive to good management practice in order to maximise the potential for the health work force to deliver quality health services</p>	<p>Creating a culture of valuing all workers</p> <p>Providing adequate tools or technology for professionals working within the health system to perform their duties in line with their training</p>
<p>7 South Africa's role in international health issues contributing to leadership, scientific advances and global health professions is critical</p>	<p>Influencing global HR research and production</p> <p>Promotion of cooperation between the South African Health System and other health systems regionally and internationally</p> <p>Influencing and directing international aid towards the country's capacity development priorities</p> <p>Exerting influence through advocacy in international forums</p> <p>Understanding and influencing global HR market trends</p>
<p>8 South Africa's contribution in the short to medium term to the global health market must be managed in such a way that it contributes to the skills development of health professionals</p>	<p>Optimisation of the bilateral agreements that South Africa enters into with various countries</p>
<p>9 Mobilisation of funding to ensure successful implementation of the plan</p>	<p>Appropriate funding of provincial initiatives to develop and implement HRH plans</p> <p>Appropriate HR Information Systems to enable good planning</p> <p>Active contribution of the private health sector in HRH production</p>

Guiding Principle	Strategic Objective
<p style="text-align: center;">10</p> <p>The Department of Health must ensure that it has the technical expertise necessary to lead health workforce planning</p>	<p>Possession of high expertise through acquiring of sound technical skills to plan, research and manage health workforce planning</p> <p>Interaction through collaboration with other countries that engage in workforce planning</p> <p>Development of internal expertise through promotion of research into human resources for health</p>

In order for the plan to be up to date in addressing the HR challenges faced by the country, stakeholder participation in reviewing this document and the proposals made was strongly encouraged. The gulf between the public and private health sectors needs to be reduced and the plan is therefore geared towards the attainment of national goals. There is also an absolute need for the health system to possess credible data and information regarding human resources for health so that the health department as a whole can plan better.

During the consultation process stakeholders seeking to contribute to the process were particularly requested to cover the following in their submissions:

- Identify the gaps – i.e. what has not been covered that you feel is critical to include in this framework?
- Concrete suggestion/s on how such gaps can be addressed
- What kind of resources do you think will be needed to address this gap?

The National Human Resource Plan is a national guideline for all stakeholders. It outlines broad issues whilst taking the lead in some areas in order to facilitate the resolution of some of the chronic systemic challenges facing the health system. In implementing this plan, all stakeholders will be required to adapt to the guidelines expressed here. It is envisaged that there will be a measure of variation between the provinces, because each province must take into consideration the prevailing conditions and demands on its human resource capacity to plan objectively. National norms, where these are declared, are therefore guidelines, not absolutes.

The provincial and private sector HR Plans must at least address the attainment of the following goals:

- HR planning in line with national guidelines or framework
- Appropriate organisational development and change management
- Total number of employees, professional and non-professional, required to deliver health services adequate for the population
- Appropriate percentage breakdown of professional versus non-professional workers
- Appropriate percentage of health trained versus non-health trained professionals
- The appropriate skill-mix of the province or organisation’s health workforce
- Appropriate composition of the health workforce by race, gender, age, disability, in order to achieve employment equity targets
- Recruitment, selection and retention of appropriately qualified staff

- Appropriate geographical allocation of the health workforce
- Effective implementation of a performance management system

At a national level the HRH Plan must address strategic or macro-health workforce issues such as:

- Production of health professionals and monitoring of the trends
- Funding of health sciences education and training
- Improvement of strategies aimed specifically at international recruitment of skills needed in the health sector and at retention of skilled staff
- Strategies for retention of skilled staff in national institutions of education, research etc
- Development of health management capacity at national level
- Development of indicators to enable monitoring of the provincial HRH plans
- Development and maintenance of a national HRH Databank to enable better national health workforce planning
- Harmonisation and management of internationally funded human capital building programmes
- Constantly determining demand versus supply, as informed by the gap analysis done at provincial level

As human resource management is critical to the attainment of the national strategic priorities, it is essential that the Department of Health identify strategic partners for the implementation of the various aspects of this plan. Successful implementation of these elements will also better the performance of other policy instruments, e.g. the Health Sector Charter, in so far as transformation issues are concerned, District Health Services as regards staffing, participation at international level where South Africa currently plays a significant role and is one of the suppliers of well trained health personnel and so on.

The action plan has prioritised certain areas for immediate implementation. Although this plan does not seek to provide solutions to daily operational challenges it provides a framework for managing such challenges or problems in the long term. Improvement of the conditions of service and remuneration for health professionals constitute the most urgent priorities. Development of an HR databank is essential for better workforce planning throughout the health system and has therefore also been prioritised. Skills improvement of hospital managers is likewise prioritised because of the immediate impact on the quality of health services that is gained by keeping management skills at the highest level. The efficiency and effectiveness of managers impact positively on health workers.

Lastly but very importantly a guide is provided concerning how each stakeholder should go about implementing this plan. This is of particular importance to the stewardship role of the Ministry of Health over the country as a whole, including the private health sector.