



“Achievement through Positive Change and Affirmative Action”

OFFICE OF THE BOARD CHAIRMAN

**TO : Mr Samson Komati
WH Development Forum**

**FROM : Chairman
WHPHA**

DATE : 16th January 2021

Dear Mr Komati,

RE: DEFAMATORY AND UNSUBSTANTIATED COMMENTS ON WHATSAPP

It has been brought to my attention that once again, Samson Komati has been making ill-informed and mischievous statements on the WhatsApp WH Development Forum platform (14/01/2021) regarding our CEO, Hospital Manager, my fellow Board Members and me. If he had taken the time to firstly make contact or organise an appointment with our CEO or with me to address his concerns, he may have not been so quick to launch into a tirade of commentary, which is clearly inaccurate and wrong.

Nearly all the comments have no basis in truth or substance and many are highly defamatory in nature, because Mr Komati and others who have made similar statements do not have any facts to substantiate the claims made, and the comments seem to be designed to cause reputational damage.

WHPHA, as with all other provincial health authorities, receives no money (ie. zero kina) in its annual budget to purchase drugs and medical consumables. These are supposed to be provided to all PHAs through the respective Area Medical Stores, which in turn are supplied by the National Department of Health. Unfortunately, this system is seriously flawed, with many pharmaceutical items regularly out of stock, and when shipped, are often short-supplied. There is nothing new in this, as WHPHA has been claiming for many years and, indeed, if Mr Komati requires further evidence, I would refer him to the recent report from the Public Accounts Committee into the supply of drugs in the public sector.

However, notwithstanding the fact that WHPHA receives no money in the annual appropriation to purchase drugs, our Board and Management Team have taken the view that we cannot effectively operate a health service on this basis and, as evidence of this, in 2020 we spent over K2.1 million on purchasing drugs and medical consumables to make up the shortfall that should have been provided by NDoH (ie, an average of nearly K6,000 per day 366 days for the year). Quite obviously, this unbudgeted expenditure impacts other services that we would otherwise be able to

provide, but the key point here is that it is patently untrue, as Mr Komati contends, that Mount Hagen Hospital is without drugs and patients are sent away without treatment because of this.

Similarly, in the main the allocation of specialist medical officers (SMOs) is made by NDoH and our ability to appoint more medical officers (MOs) is determined by the Department of Personnel Management (DPM) in funding additional positions and permitting us to recruit. We have been requesting additional SMOs from the Health Department for a number of years and have had a submission for a restructure lodged with DPM since early 2018, which remains outstanding. Mount Hagen Hospital is a very busy institution, and to provide some perspective, is busier than Angau Memorial Hospital on an activity basis. However, Angau has 30 more SMOs/MOs and 100 more nurses.

Notwithstanding the above, however, I refute Mr Komati's allegation that patients are being "rejected" due to a "shortage of specialised doctors". Our Team is both dedicated and hardworking and despite the significant strain placed on them by the high patient to clinician ratio, perform admirably.

The Board Members and I as Chairman are appointed by the National Minister for Health, following the process set out in the legislation. None of the Board members are there to make money and, indeed, from a personal viewpoint, it costs me a significant amount every year in lost revenue from my business for me to perform my role as Chairman of WHPHA.

As already pointed out by our CEO, I do not live in Mt Hagen and certainly do not have an apartment provided for me at Kapal Haus, as claimed by Mr Komati. Furthermore, the CEO, Mr David Vorst and the Hospital Manager, Ms Jane Holden do live in rental accommodation at Kapal Haus, but the cost is not K15,000 each per month. Rather, the rent paid for each unit is K5,000 (plus GST), which was negotiated with the WH Provincial Government in view of the service that WHPHA provides to our Province. This fact could have been easily obtained instead of making wild false claims.

It is also disappointing that once again allegations are being made that WHPHA is providing a substandard service. Whilst it is a well-known fact that in this country the health sector is under-resourced, within those limitations the Board and Management have been and are providing good services for the people of WHP. I recommend that Mr Komati consults the Sector Performance Annual Report (SPAR) available from the NDoH, or indeed I am sure the CEO would be happy to make a copy available to him, where he will find that on the raw data WHPHA tops the list of health indicators. Further, a check of the hospital data will show that mortality rates are far lower in Western Highlands than the National averages. In addition, an interesting fact is that 30% of both adult and paediatric admissions to Mount Hagen Hospital come from neighbouring highlands provinces, which would not be occurring if the quality of health care was seen to be inferior.

I am uncertain as to why questions have been asked about the composition of the Board, as the names of Members have been in the public domain for a considerable time. In any event, whilst these names have been provided by Mr Vorst in his reply to

some of Mr Komati's accusations earlier, I will list them again as follows: Michael Pundia (Deputy Chairman), Naomi Nolick, Philip Talpa, Bob Hargreaves, Margaret Duckworth, Rev James Koi, Leo Berka, Ken Wai and myself (Chairman). The former PA, Mr Joseph Neng, was an ex-officio member and, as I stated above, all were appointed by the Health Minister. For the record, all of my fellow Board Members are fully committed to providing the best possible health services for the people of our Province with the resources that are available.

With regards to the unfortunate commentary in relation to the ethnicity of our CEO and Hospital Manager, I note that both engagements followed due process, with the involvement of DPM and NDoH, and complied with the merit-based appointment procedures required by NEC. Western Highlands is very fortunate to have senior managers of the calibre and experience of Mr Vorst and Ms Holden, the benefits of which are reflected in our health indicators, the fact that so many in-patients from other highlands provinces choose the services of Mount Hagen Hospital, and the recognition by local and international agencies. I acknowledge Dr Ben Yapo's recent comments in this regard also.

On Mr Komati's query as to why construction work on Togoba HC, Tinsley and Kotna District Hospitals has not been completed, I note that Mr Vorst has already provided a reply.

Finally, with regards to Mr Komati's commentary about Mr Vorst having reached his retirement age, for the record I confirm that it is correct that the Minister wrote to me requesting information in relation to this matter. I replied within the prescribed time acknowledging the issue and that the Board had sought a legal opinion on the matter. I advised the Minister that our legal advice recommended that it was safer for the Board to let Mr Vorst complete his contract, which only had a few months to run, and to advise him that the contract would not be renewed thereafter. My response was accepted by the Minister. As Mr Vorst has advised, his contract expires on 19th February.

The CEO and the Board are always ready to answer questions and I would suggest that firstly discussing issues rather than making wild accusations without a grain of truth is a far more mature and professional way for so called elites to behave. Furthermore, I feel that if Mr Komati truly has Western Highlands' interest at heart, he should be seeking out ways to work more closely with organisations such as WHPHA to address the shortcomings in Waigani, which seriously impact our ability to improve service delivery, rather than grandstanding. If this is possible, I look forward to us working together for a stronger and better Western Highlands.

Western Highlands Provincial Health Authority

**D G Guinn CSM OBE OAM
Chairman**