Bogus doctors exposed

In a joint operation, the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), the department of health (DoH), Medicines Control Council and South African Police Services crime intelligence busted a number of doctors, who have been practising illegally and employing unregistered doctors to treat unsuspecting patients.

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Sick note scam

Dr Rasheed Mahfouz was arrested on suspicion of operating an illegal practice. He has been suspended following an unethical conduct ruling against him by the HPCSA in May 2015, after he was found guilty of practising outside the scope of his profession.

Dr Mahfouz and his partner, Dr Lobey Bola - a Congolese 'locum doctor' - were dispensing schedule 1-5 medicines, some of which had expired. The practice they were operating from belongs to a Dr Lotter and drs Mahfouz and Bola are his partners. Dr Lotter does not practise from the facility. Sick note pads bearing the doctors signatures and medical aid claims were confiscated.

The administration staff working for the three doctors were being paid in cash on a daily basis and did not have a record of their salaries.

During questioning, Dr Mafhouz refuted any claims of being suspended, but later admitted he was appealing the decision. He also admitted to hiring Dr Bola without verification of his credentials. With regards to his dispensing licence, he showed law enforcement officials his certificates on courses completed in medicine dispensation, citing he was not aware it was not a licence.

At the scene, some members of public, expressed frustration over the arrest of the two doctors as they "buy sick notes" from them.

Four illegal practices uncovered

The joint operation also revealed four other practices run by the doctors operating under the name of a Dr Augustus in Dunoon, Paarl and two in Khayelitsha. The HPCSA has established that although Dr Augustus was still registered with the council, his practice was based in Fort Beaufort in the Eastern Cape and he has since retired.

"The HPCSA's mandate is to protect the public and guide professions by ensuring enforcement and compliance from practitioners in line with the provisions of the Health Professions Act. Illegal practitioners are not only breaking the law but they are putting people's lives at risk," a statement from the council says.

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