

Doctors blame province for equipment shortages

A total of R53m of the R80m budget for equipment for the Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital was not spent in the 2013/14 financial year.



Vital diagnostic equipment remains unrepaired at Gauteng hospitals and yet the budget for new equipment are not spent. Image: [Brian J OGrady](#)

But the hospital says it is not at fault because the Gauteng Department of Health had not approved orders placed by several of the hospital's departments for new equipment such as X-ray machines

Instead, claim the sources, the department withheld the money and did not release the funds.

One source said heads of department had submitted order forms for equipment but had heard nothing from the Department of Health.

Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital is in dire need of colonoscopes, gastroscopes, beds for the intensive-care unit, and operating tables, to list just some of the equipment.

A shortage of diagnostic equipment affects every department at the hospital because doctors must wait longer to discover what is wrong with their patients.

Patients forced to wait

The wait for access to a CAT scanner used to diagnose many forms of cancer can be four months, according to figures released in the Gauteng legislature in 2012.

In private hospitals the wait is seldom much more than a day.

"Every day a cancer patient waits for diagnosis he or she may be one day closer to death," said the Chief Executive of Campaigning for Cancer, Lauren Pretorius.

She said the Gauteng health department has been aware of breakdowns in machinery at all its tertiary hospitals since 2012.

The department did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

Of the R419m budgeted for provincial and central hospitals R257m remained unspent. The money was earmarked for machinery and equipment in 2011 and 2012.

Section 27 researcher Daygan Eagar has repeatedly said the health department is under-funded and uses each year's budget to repay old debt and it still runs out of money before year-end. Money for medicines and supplies is often spent on paying wages.

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