



Contribution to the Health professions Council of Namibia Bill

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NUDO President, MP

Hon Deputy Speaker, Hon Members, I take the floor to thank and applaud my Minister, our Minister of Health and Social Services, Hon Dr Kalumbi Shangula for tabling the Health Professions Council of Namibia Bill which to me is long overdue. At present there are five (5) five Health Professions Councils, each Council regulated by its own Act. The Allied Health Professions Council of Namibia consists of 15 members, the Medical and Dental Council of Namibia has 12 members, while the Nursing Council of Namibia, the Pharmacy Council of Namibia and the Social Work and Psychology Council of Namibia consist each of 8 members. **Hon Dep Speaker, Hon Members,** this results in the Council to have a total number of 51 persons. This is too big. It also means that there are five (5) Acts/Laws currently administered by one Secretariat. The Bill that the Hon Minister has just introduced, makes provision for

establishment of a single Health Professions Council of Namibia which will replace the existing five Health Professions Councils and serve as the umbrella body to regulate and control the health professions in Namibia. The Bill further, attempts to consolidate five Acts which were reading almost the same into one Act. The Health Professions Council of Namibia, once enacted will execute the powers and perform the functions of the existing five Councils.

Hon Dep Speaker, Hon Members, the Bill thus, introduces a unitary regulatory authority for all healthcare professions in Namibia without them losing their identities and opportunities to deal with matters that are profession specific. This structural changes will ease administration as there will be one Registrar and one Secretariat to cater for all healthcare professions. I want to believe this arrangement will be more cost-effective, efficient and effective as the new Council will consist of 11 members compared to the current 51. There may be some savings on the sitting and travelling costs on the number of Council membership because the minimum number of Council meetings are stipulated by law per year while that of the Boards and Committees can be manipulated based on availability of funds. A smaller number of Council members will also not require to hire space for meeting venues as is the case currently with the Medical and Dental and Allied Health Professions Councils.

Major savings will also come from audit fees as each Council currently has its own bank accounts that are audited and reported separately at high fees.

Furthermore, **Hon Dep Speaker, Hon Members**, the Bill will bring about effective collaboration between different healthcare professions through joint appointment of committees dealing with matters such as impairment of practitioners, ethics, CPD and Telehealth (the use of communications technologies to provide health care at a distance). The Bill introduces the licensure regime for practitioners providing clinical care to patients and its renewal will be linked to maintaining acceptable professional knowledge and skills through CPD. This is crucial to safeguard the well-being of service users/clients/patients who interact with the healthcare practitioners.

In his introduction, the Hon Minister of HSS expounded that the five Councils are able to mobilize financial resources to supplement funding from Treasury but that Councils also need to raise additional funds to supplement their operations. Some of the Councils are financially sound, especially those with more membership. The Nursing Council of Namibia for instance, has a significant number of membership and is in a far better position to generate funds through membership fees enabling this Council to finance its operations. This is not the case with all the

Councils, the Social Work and Psychology Council of Namibia for example, due to a limited number of social workers and psychologists, has fewer practitioners and depends on the annual government grant. Thus, the Bill will enable the professions to pull together their resources so that even the professions with smaller number of practitioners will have means to investigate complaints of malpractices from the public.

Hon Dep Speaker, Hon Members, as I moved towards conclusion, it is a fact that there is serious shortages in a number of health disciplines, lack of human resources in disciplines such as psychiatry, psychology, social work. Besides that, where we enough trained professionals, it becomes at times a challenge to deploy them in areas where their services are most needed. So, with the introduction of this Bill, the situation can be attended to through the introduction of the category of compulsory Public Service for newly registered practitioners to be placed where their services is needed most for a specified period of time before they may be allowed to practice independently.

In conclusion, Hon Dep Speaker, Hon Members, the adoption of this Bill will fast-track the establishment of the Health Professions Council of Namibia, a regulatory body that will oversees and governs the practice of health workers. The primary aim here is to protect and safeguard service users and

the public at large by ensuring that health professionals meet the required standards of competence and conduct. Bill sets the foundation for effective administration and patient safety. I'm therefore, confident that all members of this august House support the adoption of this Bill. I end with the wise words of Dr Weyulu who advocates for a shift from the traditional way of regulating healthcare professions that focuses exclusively on individual healthcare practitioners to one that includes systemic and organisational determinants of patient safety, and simultaneously ensures that both individuals and systems can be held accountable when appropriate.

Hon Dep Speaker, I so submit and I support the Bill wholeheartedly.

