MEDIA STATEMENT

THE EMERGENCY CARE BOARD DISTURBED BY CALLS FOR EMERGENCY CARE PROVIDERS TO CARRY FIREARMS DURING THE FESTIVE SEASON

13 December 2018
For immediate release

Pretoria – The Emergency Care Board, under the ambit of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), is disturbed and would like to distance itself from the calls made by the South African Emergency Personnel's Union (SAEPU) for emergency care practitioners to carry firearms when on duty during this festive season.

The safety of emergency care practitioners has been in the spotlight and is of grave concern for the Board. This is resulting from the spiralling increase in the attacks of such practitioners while they are on duty across the country. Emergency care practitioners put their lives at risk every day to provide a service to communities. It is therefore unacceptable and should be condemned in the strongest possible terms that they become victims of such reported rampant attacks. This matter is receiving the necessary attention by all key stakeholders. The recent symposium that was hosted by the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), in collaboration with the Provincial Government of the Western Cape College (PGWC), the National Department of Health (NDoH) and the civil society was one such platform for stakeholders to meet and find solutions to these societal issues. The symposium position statement is very clear on the next steps that all stakeholders needs to undertake in addressing this issue.

The Board, however, believe that carrying of firearms by the practitioners while on duty will negatively impact on the image of the profession,” said Mr Lesiba Arnold Malotana, the Chairperson of the Emergency Care Board.

This was confirmed by the Board resolution which was taken in 2012, which pronounced against calls for emergency care practitioners to be armed. The carrying of firearms by emergency care practitioners will not only result in a negative impact on the profession, but will create confusion and an expectation in the communities that emergency care practitioners have an obligation to also act as peace keeping or law enforcement agencies while on duty.
Apart from confusing the public, emergency care practitioners themselves may become conflicted as to their role and actions they need to take in crime and unrest situations. The carrying of firearms will thus undermine the patient-practitioner relationship and erode the trust between the two. Clinicians are required to project an image of an impartial, caring and compassionate individuals. Practitioners carrying firearms may therefore instil fear and confusion to patients being treated.

“As the Board, we are making a call to our communities across the country to support and help our emergency care practitioners as they bring the much needed service the communities. If practitioners are allowed to carry firearms, this may have unintended consequences and will further expose practitioners and increase their chances of being victims of crime” concluded Mr Malotana.

END

About the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA)

The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) also known as Council is a statutory body established under the Health Professions Act 56 of 1974. The HPCSA is committed to protecting the public and guiding the professions. The mission of the HPCSA is quality and equitable healthcare for all.

The HPCSA is mandated to regulate the health professions in the country in aspects pertaining to education, training and registration, professional conduct and ethical behaviour, ensuring Continuing Professional Development (CPD), and fostering compliance with healthcare standards.

In order to safeguard the public and guiding the professions, registration in terms of the Act is a prerequisite for practising any of the health professions registrable with Council.

Issued on behalf of the Emergency Care Board by:

Daphney Chuma  
Head of Division: Corporate Affairs  
Health Professions Council of South Africa  
Tel: 012 338 9481  
Cell: 071 680 8111  
Email: daphneyc@hpcsa.co.za