

A CHRONOLOGY OF WOMEN'S STRUGGLES IN HEALTH

- 1913 - Formation of the South African Trained Nurses Association (SATNA). The original aims were to promote the professional interests of nurses and to suppress the practice of nursing by unqualified persons.
- 1927 - White nurses at Mafeking Hospital object to Dr. Molema, a black doctor, seeing white patients at the hospital. The nurses went on strike demanding that Dr. Molema be prevented from seeing private and fee-paying patients at the Hospital. Dr. Molema sued the nurses and won his case. A fund was established by the white population of Mafeking to help the nurses pay the costs of the case and the settlement.
- 1942 - A meeting was held in Johannesburg to discuss organising nurses into a trade union. The meeting was addressed by Union workers who proposed a constitution at the meeting. The South African Trained Nurses Association (SATNA) opposed unionisation. Amongst their objections were comments that "a political aura clung to such organisations", nurses would have to join an organisation that was "not professional", and that the "social stigma" of being union members was undesirable. They also complained that a trade unionist had said "give us the nurses of the country and we shall have any government where we want them".
- 1944 - The Nursing Act, No. 45 of 1944, was passed. This made the unionisation of nurses, illegal, and called for the establishment of the S A Nursing Council and S A Nursing Association. The Act also enforced

compulsory membership of SANA, denying nurses the freedom of association.

- 1949 - Student nurses at Victoria Hospital in Lovedale strike in support of a colleague who was unfairly suspended. The student nurses suspected that Nurse Dladla was victimised because of her part in a petition complaining about aspects of the hospital. The student nurses refused to work, slept outside, and refused to eat at the hospital. The parents formed a Committee and made certain request to the Hospital Board to ensure nobody would be victimised for their part in the strike. The nurses subsequently went back to work. Later the same year another crisis occurred at the hospital when nurses refused to attend certain religious meetings. Eventually the Superintendent had the hospital closed as a training hospital for nurses.
- 1958 - The government stated that all nurses would require pass-book numbers in order to register for nursing or to undertake further courses in their training. This was part of an attempt by the State to get black women to accept pass-books. The Federation of South African Women and the ANC Womens' League opposed this and organised a public campaign against it. Over 500 women attended a meeting inside Baragwanath Hospital even though the police put up a massive display of security in order to intimidate the women.
- 1959 - The South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) started a Hospital Workers Union and began organising in Durban and Cape Town.
- 1960 - Health workers at Karl Brenner Hospital in Stellenbosch strike in demand for better wages and working conditions. White nurses supported the black unskilled hospital workers who were striking. Shouting "we are with you". The Hospital Workers Union was demanding "a pound a day".
- 1961 - Twelve nurses were caned by a matron at King George TB Hospital in Durban. A strike was organised by

the Hospital Workers' Union and skilled and unskilled workers supported the demands that the matron be fired. Other demands of the workers included demands for equal eating facilities, proper food, the establishment of an employment insurance fund, and the end to racial discrimination in the hospital service. Over 300 hospital workers participated in the two week strike. The hospital was cordoned off by police. Community members donated food in support of strikers. International support for the strike was offered by unions in Canada, England, Latin America, USA and Europe. Some of the demands of the workers were met but others were ignored. Twenty-one workers were dismissed.

- 1961 - Hospital Superintendent fired after releasing details of the number of deaths and casualties in the Sharpeville massacre. Community Health Workers in the area supported the Superintendent.
- 1972 - Black doctors in Durban go-slow in protest against unequal salaries for doctors.
- 1973 - Student midwives at Zulu McCord's Hospital protest at their low salaries. They were earning less than forty rands per month when they decided to strike in favour of higher wages.
- 1980 - Health worker organisations were established in Natal, the Transvaal, and the Cape. These organisations aim to break down traditional barriers between health workers by bringing them together in one organisation. These organisations accept all hospital workers as members, regardless of their skills or level of training.
- 1980 - Hospital workers in Cape Town ask the General Workers Union to assist them in organising themselves so that they can raise problems and grievances with the hospital authorities. The Union soon achieved majority membership in many hospitals and representative workers' committees were established in these hospitals.

- 1981 - Crisis at Baragwanath Hospital. Radiographers who have received only one year's training get much lower wages than fully qualified radiographers. Those who trained at Baragwanath had no choice but to do the one year course. Although many of these supplementary radiographers had served at Bara for many years, their conditions of work are poor and salaries are very low. Thirty seven radiographers leave Baragwanath Hospital in protest. Community members and Trade Unions pledge support.
- 1982 - Nurses oppose forced segregation into separate homeland nursing associations. Nurses oppose re-organisation of S.A. Nursing Association which still ensures that white nurses dominate the organisation.
- 1982 - Alternative Medical Association proposed by doctors dissatisfied with the Medical Association of South Africa (MASA). The organisation aims to work for a healthy society in which the health of all people is promoted in a just and democratic society.
- 1982 - The National Medical and Dental Association (NMDA) is formed. Dr Delisa Mji, general secretary of NMDA said:

"We are a nonracial body of progressive doctors and dentists and we recognise the link between health and socio-economic issues. We also recognise that the attainment of optimum health is only possible in a free and democratic society".

The organisation intends to seek international recognition, and has begun recruiting members.

The Association stated that MASA (the Medical Association of S.A.) has failed to articulate the health needs of the majority of South Africans and identifies closely with the State and its policies.

- 1982 - 400 workers at Hillbrow Hospital strike in demand for more pay and better working conditions. The workers included cooks, domestics, cleaners, clerks, and typists. An elected committee met with hospital

authorities and presented the demands of the workers to the superintendant. Some of the strikers carried placards saying "We are working for peanuts" and "50 per cent increase". The workers have not won their demands but are deciding on how to organise themselves to articulate their demands.

The chronology presented above is incomplete. CRITICAL HEALTH is interested to obtain more information about the above events, and occurrences not documented. We would appreciate any letters, press cuttings, documents, etc. dealing with the organisation of health workers.

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