

Public Statement by Rt Hon Sir Mekere Morauta

Former Prime Minister and Member for Moresby North-West
Port Moresby, 17 January 2019

O'Neill and Temu in denial about health crisis



The Member for Moresby North-West, Sir Mekere Morauta, said today the Prime Minister and Health Minister should start listening to doctors – and patients - right throughout the country and admit that the health system is in crisis.

Sir Mekere said recent statements by Dr James Naipao, President of the PNG Doctors' Association, and Professor Glen Mola from the Medical School, highlight urgent and serious issues that the Government is refusing to acknowledge or do anything about.

"The health system is in crisis – everyone knows that – but Peter O'Neill and Puka Temu are just letting people die or suffer," the former Prime Minister said.

"They have thousands of deaths from preventable disease, from common illnesses, from injury, on their consciences. When are they going to acknowledge the duty they have to manage the health system and fund health priorities properly?"

Dr Naipao said doctors were unhappy with "the way the Health Department bureaucrats and the Health Minister were painting a pretty picture of health-related issues when the reality was completely different, and bad. Why are the higher hierarchy of the Health Department and the Health Minister, Sir Puka Temu, openly saying all is well in health service delivery when health workers on the ground are saying the opposite," Dr Naipao asked.

He and Dr Mola point to the widespread lack of basic drugs, disease test kits and basic medical equipment and supplies. Dr Mola estimates that up to 5000 babies have died or been disabled since the end of 2016 when the country ran out of syphilis test kits. He also confirms that the country has run out of HIV test kits and paediatric HIV drugs to prevent babies from contracting HIV from their mothers.

According to Dr Mola, "this will not only lead to about 2500 unnecessary infant HIV deaths per annum, but it also puts our whole population at risk" and makes the management and treatment of TB harder, given the high rate of TB/HIV co-infection.

Sir Mekere said doctors had also reported that the Health Minister, the Secretary and senior officers in the department were "running around like headless chooks", because the Prime Minister had sent out an instruction that there be no drug stock-outs during February when the Vote of No Confidence period commences.

"How ridiculous is this?" Sir Mekere asked "The Prime Minister is only concerned about his political survival, not the welfare of people."

According to doctors, more than 100 lines of essential drugs and supplies are currently out of stock, including antibiotics, surgical gloves, sutures, fluids, and that very soon there will be a stock-out of HIV drugs as well.

Sir Mekere said the crisis in the health system, especially the medical supplies chain, underscore the wasteful expenditure by the O'Neill Government on APEC, corruption in government and the breakdown of government systems and processes.

"Where are all the APEC goodies promised by PM and APEC Minister Tkatchenko?" he asked. "Where is the manna that was supposed to descend from APEC heaven?"

"The two-day wonder of APEC has left the country in tatters and the people of Papua New Guinea suffering."

As Professor Mola said, "unless the government starts showing some concern for the people and providing health workers with basic supplies to prevent disease, treat their patients and also prevent health workers from getting life-threatening diseases from patients, it should not be a surprise to anybody if health workers just stop work."