

Gauteng health department gave NGO Precious Angels R1m, Barbara Creecy says

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Precious Angels, the most deadly nongovernmental organisation (NGO) in the Life Esidimeni saga, received R1m from the Gauteng department of health.



Barbara Creecy, Gauteng finance MEC. Photo: Brenda Masilela/Africa News

In total, 18 patients died in two homes called Precious Angels, run by owner Ethel Ncube.

The figures were released by Gauteng MEC for finance Barbara Creecy, who was testifying at the Life Esidimeni hearings.

The hearings aim to find out why 1,700 patients were moved from three Esidimeni psychiatric homes into ill-equipped NGOs, leading to the deaths of 143 patients.

Creecy disclosed that R47m was spent on NGOs in place of the Life Esidimeni contract. Life Esidimeni homes provided care to chronically ill psychiatric patients at a cost of about R260m a year.

The health department said it ended the contract to save money.

Families testified that at Precious Angels, patients shared spoons when there was not enough cutlery. Up to eight adults were housed in a single room. The patients also did not see doctors when medicine was prescribed for them, it emerged at the hearings.

The health ombud said he suspected that at Precious Angels, it was likely that patients died from cold, hunger and dehydration.

Ncube testified at the hearings that the Gauteng department of health did not pay her for patients for three months.

"We did not get paid for three months. Most of the patients were in diapers. We would [use] seven bags of diapers in a day or two."

She said she relied on donations from family and used savings from her stokvel groups as well as her mother's savings to feed patients.

She did not pay rent and was evicted. "I suffered," she said, also disclosing that her car was repossessed. She paid caregivers R1,700 a month.

However, it emerged on Tuesday that Ncube eventually was paid R1m, even though Precious Angels was one of the first NGOs to be shut down due to the poor care it offered.

What also emerged in Creecy's testimony is that when former Gauteng health head of department Barney Selebano and MEC Qedani Mahlangu said they wanted to end the Esidimeni contract, they made no mention of using NGOs to care for patients. Instead, they suggested that patients be moved into state institutions.

In 2014, Mahlangu admitted there were not adequate facilities in the state for such chronic patients. However, the move went ahead in 2016 and many ill-equipped NGOs were used for patients.

Creecy also testified that the health department was told when cost cutting that "the level of service must not deteriorate".

Source: *BDpro*

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