

## Safety fears after security guards robbed at Livingstone

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Security guards tasked with protecting Livingstone Hospital staff and patients ended up becoming the targets of criminals when they were robbed at gunpoint in the middle of the night.

Shortly after midnight on Sunday, three security guards were robbed of their cell-phones at the Korsten facility's gate guardhouse. Police spokesperson

Captain Andre Beettege said the guards were approached at about 12.30am by three masked and armed suspects who demanded they hand over their cellphones.

The robbers then fled. National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (Nehawu) regional secretary Samkelo Msila said the incident again highlighted the ongoing safety concerns at Livingstone and other facilities in the region.

"Our major concern is that

this is not the first incident at the hospital," Msila said.

"Late last year, a pair of workers in the IT department were robbed of their cell-phones and laptops at gunpoint.

"In this latest incident, the same people meant to protect the facility are being robbed.

"Another concern is that the entrance is meant to be locked at 8pm and only opened for emergencies, but it seems these suspects could walk straight up to the guardhouse."

He said the union, representing the largest number of employees at the facility, intended to meet hospital management on the safety concerns and other issues.

"The management did not even know about this incident until our shop steward inquired, so how can we know that they are doing what they are supposed to in terms of managing a facility of that size."

Health & Other Services Personnel Trade Union of SA (Hospersa) provincial secretary

Dorothy Ndhlovu said the safety of healthcare workers in SA, particularly in the Eastern Cape, had reached a critical point.

"This situation has now escalated to the point where healthcare professionals no longer feel safe in the very spaces where they are entrusted to provide care," Ndhlovu said.

"The Nelson Mandela Bay municipality, in particular, is grappling with a surge in violent crime, directly affecting

service delivery within health-care facilities.

"From the frequent robberies and attacks on ambulances to the violence experienced at clinics and community health centres, workers face constant threats of harm."

She said the psychological toll of the violence was equally concerning, with numerous workers developing post-traumatic stress disorder following these incidents.

"It is important to emphasise that this is not an isolated

issue. These incidents are becoming increasingly common, with healthcare professionals and their workplaces regularly targeted by violent criminals.

"When these attacks occur the department fails to take responsibility, leaving staff without compensation for stolen personal property or with a lack of support for their recovery."

She said this absence of accountability was deeply concerning.

"Our proposals have

consistently outlined the steps necessary to create safer work environments.

"A key recommendation is the implementation of a comprehensive risk assessment to inform proactive security measures.

"Unfortunately, the department's response has remained reactive rather than preventive.

"For example, at Livingstone Hospital, basic security infrastructure such as CCTV monitoring, automated gate systems

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**Publication:** The Herald

**Page:** 1

**Title:** Safety fears after security guards robbed at Livingstone

**Publish Date:** 18 March 2025

**AVE:** 17730.45

**Author:** Tremain van Aardt

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and panic buttons linked to an armed response team are glaringly absent.

"These basic security measures are vital to ensure the safety of staff and patients alike.

"Healthcare workers are essential to the wellbeing of the community and their safety should be a priority.

"As Hospersa, we raised this matter at the chamber level but the management decided to throw the agenda out of the window."

Health department spokesperson Siyanda Manana said the three armed men allegedly came through the front main entrance of the hospital opposite Shoprite and robbed the three women security guards

who were seated in the guard-house.

"They pointed guns at them and took their personal phones and the company cellphone.

"No staff or patients were affected during the incident."

Manana said a similar attack occurred at the hospital last year.

He condemned what he labelled as attacks on all

healthcare facilities, which he said had become regular occurrences in the metro.

"The department will work hand-in-glove with law enforcement authorities to bring the culprits to book.

"We implore everyone who might have seen or heard anything about the incident to please contact the police so that the perpetrators can be

brought to justice.

"Healthcare facilities must be protected at all costs because such incidents trample on our people's rights to health care and safety at our institutions."

In October, a report was tabled as part of the Taking the Legislature to the People community engagements which highlighted issues of safety,

understaffing and a lack of budget within the Bay health district. At the time, responding to the report, health MEC Ntandokazi Capa said crime had resulted in most facilities not being functional as staff were burnt out and scared to report for duty.

She said the department had set aside R11m to deal with issues of security.