

Medicine shortages and challenges with the procurement process among public sector hospitals in South Africa; findings and implications

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Background: Medicine shortages are a complex global challenge affecting all countries, and a key aspect of drug utilization patterns. This includes South Africa (SA) where ongoing medicine shortages are a concern among public sector hospitals as SA strives for universal access to healthcare. This research aimed to highlight challenges affecting medicines availability in the current pharmaceutical procurement process for public sector hospitals in SA. **Methods:** Qualitative in-depth interviews conducted among 10 pharmacy managers in public sector hospitals in Gauteng Province, SA. A content analysis was performed. Transcripts were coded by two of the authors, with categories developed and grouped into themes. **Results:** The 'Procurement process' emerged from the data as the overarching theme, rooted in five main themes: (i) Delayed payment of supplier accounts which led to suppliers withholding orders; (ii) The buy-out process that was used to procure medicines from suppliers other than the contracted ones; (iii) Suppliers not performing thereby contributing to medicine shortages in the hospitals; (iv) Shortage of active pharmaceutical ingredients causing suppliers to fail to supply orders further causing medicine shortages in the hospital; and (v) Challenges such as the inaccuracy of the electronic inventory management system used to manage the inventory in the hospitals. **Conclusion:** Effective management of supplier contracts by the National Department of Health is crucial to ensure accessibility and availability of essential medicines to all citizens. Ongoing monitoring and support for the future use of computerised inventory management systems is important to reduce medicine shortages. These are challenges for the future.