Media Statement

CONCERNS OVER POTENTIAL EXPLOITATION OF HEALTHCARE PRACTITIONERS

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For immediate release

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Pretoria – The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) has noted the practise of enticing practitioners to enter into Designated Service Provider (DSN) and Preferred Provider Network (PPN) contracts with medical aid schemes, and while these schemes may not per se be illegal, the HPCSA is concerned about the potential ethical transgressions that may arise from practitioners entering into these agreements with schemes.

DSP and PPN agreements take varied forms, but are basically when a practitioner enters into an agreement with a medical aid scheme which results in direct payment and being listed as a preferred service provider.

The area of concern is that schemes in certain instances exert pressure on medical practitioners to prescribe certain medication or take certain decisions on behalf of patients that will benefit the scheme and not necessarily the patient and/or make clinical decisions aimed at cost-cutting.

The HPCSA reminds healthcare practitioners of their obligation to always act within the best interests of their patients and to desist from entering into any arrangements that may result in the quality of clinical care being compromised.

The HPCSA has already consulted with the South African Medical Association (SAMA) which represents a large portion of medical practitioners and together we have outlined concerns where these ethical problems may arise. SAMA has been very proactive and positive in addressing these issues with their members and the Council appreciates all these efforts.

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However, all practitioners who feel unduly pressurised to sign such contracts, or are placed in any position where they feel their ethics could be compromised, are urged to contact the HPCSA for guidance. They may also contact the Council for Medical Schemes if there are any transgressions by the schemes.

We would also like to welcome patients – if they feel their health has been compromised due to such an agreement – to contact the HPCSA in this regard.

The HPCSA has a mandate to protect the rights of patients and to guide the professions across South Africa, and while healthcare costs are a constant concern to all parties, only by working together within the prescribed ethical guidelines can we ensure that all parties’ rights and responsibilities are met.

Ends

About the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA)

The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) is a statutory body and is committed to protecting the public and guiding the professions. The mission of the HPCSA is quality healthcare standards for all.

The Council is mandated to regulate the health professions in the country in aspects pertaining to registration, education and training, professional conduct and ethical behaviour, ensuring continuing Professional Development (CPD), and fostering compliance with healthcare standards.

In order to safeguard the public and indirectly the professions, registration in terms of the Act is a prerequisite for practising any of the health professions with which Council is concerned.

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