



# A Piece of my Mind

Editorial Comment

## To be or not to be?

Thank you, Mr President, for using this quotation. Our journey to NHI has been uppermost in my mind recently, particularly with the prophets of doom who say (a) it will never happen and (b) it will never work.

## How did we get here?

I realise that I am morphing into Natie Finkelstein – I want to know the history of everything before I make any decisions about future activities.

This is not some newfangled brainwave that some demented soul had. We've actually been preparing for it for years. It began with a Committee of Enquiry in 1935!

In 1994, the ANC published a National Health Plan for South Africa. The guiding principles set the scene for what was to come – The health of all South Africans will be secured and improved mainly through the achievement of equitable social and economic development, such as the level of employment, the standards of education, and the provision of housing, clean water, sanitation and electricity. In addition, reductions in the levels of violence and malnutrition, and promotion of healthy lifestyles should be addressed, as well as the provision of accessible health care services.

This was followed in 1996 by the publication of the Bill of Rights (Chapter 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa) and the National Drug Policy (NDP).

## The Bill of Rights

Interestingly (to me, anyway), only four of the rights begin "Every citizen ...". These are political rights, part of the freedom of movement and residence rights, citizenship rights, and freedom of trade, occupation and profession. Apart from children's rights, the remaining 23 rights all begin with "Everyone ...". This includes the right to health care.

Another thing that interested me is that the word "equality" is used six times, and the word equity only twice – in education rights and in a section on municipal fiscal powers.

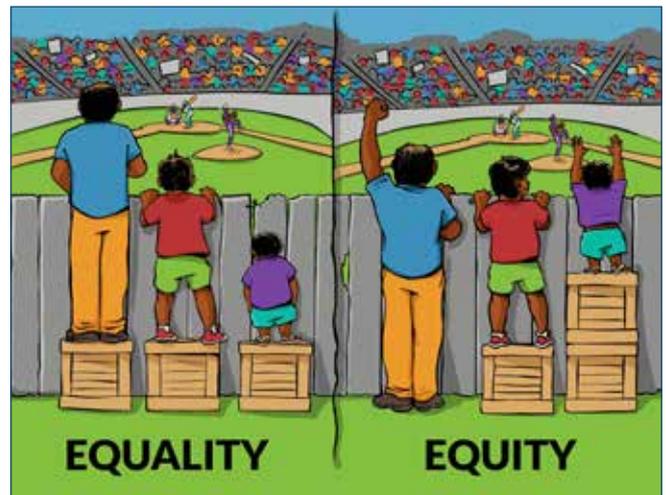
In case you haven't looked at it recently, this is the right to health care, food, water and social security:

1. Everyone has the right to have access to
  - a. health care services, including reproductive health care;
  - b. sufficient food and water; and

- c. social security, including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependants, appropriate social assistance.
2. The state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of each of these rights.
  3. No one may be refused emergency medical treatment.

## Equality vs equity

Going back to the business of equity – Andy Gray has challenged us many times. Do we really understand the difference between equality and equity? This picture is worth at least a thousand words.



Interaction Institute for Social Change  
Artist: Angus Maguire

## National Drug Policy

The NDP is even more interesting. How do you like these statements?

"The pharmaceutical sector, as a component of the health sector, reflected its deficiencies, most notably the lack of equity in access to essential drugs, with a consequent impact on quality of care."

"Furthermore, rising drug prices, already high in international terms, gave increasing cause for concern, as did evidence of irrational use of drugs, losses through malpractice and poor security, and cost-ineffective procurement and logistic practices."

Has the NDP ever been reviewed? Every three years, as it says it will be done? Really? Or maybe there were reviews to see if it is still applicable nowadays.

Some of the components have been very successfully implemented, for example the Essential Medicine programme. (And I still love the app! If you haven't downloaded it onto your phone or tablet, I really think you should!) Other components haven't worked too well – we're still waiting for the pharmacy technician suggested in 1996. (Just watch – the qualifications will probably be published on Friday and prove me wrong!) (I didn't say *which* Friday!)

### **International agreements**

Many World Health Organisation policies have been adapted to South Africa – the Millennium Development Goals were replaced in 2015 by the Sustainable Development Goals, which include a goal to implement Universal Health Coverage by 2030. All the UN member states, including South Africa, agreed to pursue this goal, if they haven't already done it.

### **Local events**

There are a string of documents outlining the journey towards NHI. The White Paper for Transformation of the Health System in South Africa was published in 1997. In 2003, the National Health Act was adopted and implemented in stages. The Re-engineering of Primary Health Care began. And the first phase of NHI has been completed.

### **Will NHI actually happen?**

I have no doubt that it will happen.

### **Will NHI actually work?**

The funding side is an enormous challenge but is largely out of our hands. Will NHI work in pharmacy? Yes, if we start identifying what and how we can contribute to it. It must work – the need is so great. BUT it will only work if you and I get actively involved.

**Lorraine Osman**