

**SASHNI PATHER**

MORE needs to be done to help upgrade public-sector nursing, which has been severely neglected.

The national department of health and the Democratic Nurses Organisation of SA, which repre-

## State, union agree nursing neglected

sents more than 60 000 nurses, agree on this.

A report released by the Human Sciences Research

Council yesterday highlights the shortage of senior nurses.

It said this was because the training of public-sector nurses has declined substantially as a result of cuts in provincial government budgets and the restructuring of higher education.

The report said that no private training school has been able to

meet the requirements that would enable it to offer a four-year degree or diploma in nursing.

The qualification must include midwifery, community and psychiatric nursing, and general nursing.

"The output of professional nurses through four-year college and university courses fell 13%

from 1997 to 2007," the report said.

"The research suggests that many nurses in training are distressed by the extent of HIV-Aids and TB, are afraid of contracting the disease themselves and believe they are not sufficiently protected [for example, there is a shortage of surgical gloves]."

The president of the Democratic Nurses Organisation, Ephraim Mafolo, said he agreed with the HSRC report.

"There is no proper human resources training, which has had a serious impact on the rate at which nurses qualify," Mafolo said. "Another troubling fact was the emergence of fly-by-night nursing colleges that exploited the poor with exorbitant fees and very little training.

"Over the last 10 years, there has been little or no production of professional nurses, while a lower category of nurses has emerged. The private sector also did not qualify to produce professional nurses, only general nurses."

Mafolo warned that the average age of nurses is 47. In 10 years, these nurses will have retired.

"The profession needs to look attractive again to candidates, with the introduction of stipends and bursaries."

Health department spokesman Fidel Hadebe said: "The already implemented nursing strategy deals with the development and training of nursing to produce the necessary numbers and upgrade the quality of nurses."

He said the application of the occupation-specific dispensation on pay to nurses before other public-sector workers was the government's response to the number of nurses leaving for the private sector.