

Dipalesa Mokoboto

MBChB (UKZN); Master of Philosophy in Medical Law and Ethics (UP); Diploma in Occupational Health and Medicine (DOH &M) (UP); Advanced Health Management (Yale University (FPD Linked))

In December 2025, Dr Dipalesa Mokoboto was promoted to the position of Chief Director in Occupational Health in the Department of Mineral and Petroleum Resources. In this new role, she will be heading and overseeing occupational health in the Mine Health and Safety Inspectorate (MHSI), which is responsible for regulating health and safety in the mining industry. Dipalesa, fondly known as Dips, has been in the occupational health space for more than 20 years. During her clinical years, she worked as a registrar in internal medicine at George Mukhari Academic Hospital, which was a prerequisite for specialising in dermatology, and worked in the pulmonology, diabetes, renal, hypertension, and HIV clinics. She assisted with HIV research and tutored 4th and 5th year medical and dental students. There were only a few spaces available for dermatology registrarship so, while waiting for an opening, Dipalesa registered for a Postgraduate Diploma in Occupational Health and Medicine at the University of Pretoria in 2000.



Dr Dipalesa Mokoboto
 Photograph: Dr Dipalesa Mokoboto

Fortunately – or unfortunately – Dipalesa became hooked on occupational health, and continued in that space by working as a *locum tenens* for several companies that required the services of an occupational medicine practitioner (OMP). She was permanently employed as an OMP by AngloGold Ashanti in Klerksdorp, ensuring that miners were fit for their occupations. That was not an easy task, as one had to balance several factors (although many people thought otherwise). Most mineworkers are trained only in specific skills and the possibility of losing their jobs was always at the core of decisions made by the OMP. It was, thus, imperative to ensure that the decision made about the fitness status of employees was fair and justified.

The Department of Mineral Resources recruited Dr Mokoboto as a Director in the policy unit in 2006, where she was responsible for identifying legislative gaps and making recommendations for drafting the necessary legislation required by the MHSI. After a year in the position, the Department decided that Dipalesa would be well placed as a Medical Inspector, as she was a medical doctor with postgraduate qualifications in occupational health and experience in the mining industry.

Dr Mokoboto was then legally appointed as the Medical Inspector of Mines, in line with section 49(1)(b) of the Mine Health and Safety Act (MHSA). During her tenure, she had the opportunity to assist mineworkers who were unfairly declared unfit for their occupations. This was possible through section 20 of the MHSA, which affords mineworkers the right to appeal the OMP's decision regarding their 'unfitness' status. As the Medical Inspector, she investigated all section 20 medical disputes by the mineworkers and made a final ruling on their fitness status. Essentially, she acted as an ombudsman on matters related to the fitness to work of employees. This proved to be challenging, albeit satisfying, especially when the worker could retain their job.

The MHSA encourages tripartism, and Dipalesa found herself representing the State in several committees of the Mine Health and Safety Council (MHSC). She chaired and served on the Mining Occupational Health Advisory Committee (MOHAC), and the Mining Industry TB and HIV Advisory Committee (MITHAC). She also serves on the MHSC Board and the *Occupational Health Southern Africa* Editorial Board. She was appointed by the Director General (DG) to represent the State on the Tshamiso Trust Advisory Committee, as she had been assisting the Department with queries related to compensation matters.

Dr Mokoboto has contributed to occupational health through many avenues. She was the first government official appointed as President of the Mine Medical Professionals Association (MMPA), and has served as a guest lecturer for

Postgraduate Diploma in Occupational Health (PG DOH) students at the University of Pretoria and the University of the Witwatersrand.

As a MOHAC and MITHAC committee member, she has successfully contributed to drafting legislation for the mining industry on matters related to occupational medicine, TB, and HIV – being the lead person on guidelines related to fitness to work and medical incapacity. She has also collaborated with the National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH) and the World Bank to estimate the prevalence of HIV in the mining industry. The recommendations from the collaboration resulted in mines reporting TB and HIV data to the Department, which they continue to do to date. The data received are key in determining trends and legislative gaps.

As the Medical Inspector of Mines, Dipalesa was tasked with developing regulations on the reporting of occupational diseases by the mines to the Department. The Medical Inspector developed a reporting form – the Health Incident Reporting (HIR) form – which mines have used to report occupational diseases ever since. The regulations drafted by the Medical Inspector were promulgated to guide the industry in the reporting of occupational diseases.

Being a medical person dealing with legislation led to an interest in medical law, which resulted in a Master of Philosophy in the field of Medical Law and Ethics from the University of Pretoria in 2019, and a dissertation on 'The impact of dual loyalty on health care practitioners' decisions', focusing on the mining industry, and involving OMPs. The occupational health space has been fulfilling for Dipalesa, and she has completely forgotten that her initial interest was in dermatology.

Dipalesa prefers to work under the radar and, as a result, people who don't know her are surprised when they do meet her, as they expect a huge person, and not the petite one that she is. Dynamite does come in small packages. 📌