

Community Working Group on Health



Press Statement

12 June 2020

No to Naming and Shaming of Covid-19 Escapees from Quarantine Centres

The Community Working Group on Health (CWGH) abhors the naming and shaming of people who escape from the country's quarantine centres by government as this exacerbates and entrenches stigma and discrimination against the escapees and their immediate families. This also violates the guarantee of patients' confidentiality since some of them might be infected with Covid-19 disease.

CWGH calls on the government to use a human rights-based approach when dealing with the escapees since they are also constitutionally entitled to the same rights enjoyed by everyone. In addressing the issue of escapees, the government must be guided by the Public Health Act (PHA) which states that all information concerning a user, including information relating to his or her health status, treatment or stay in a health establishment is confidential.

While we totally agree that non-disclosure of the escapees' names represents a threat to public health, we believe that approach causes more public damage than good through exacerbating stigmatisation and discrimination of both the escapee and the immediate families. We call on government to apply a more humane and civilised strategy and not an ear for an ear approach as this will take us back to the medieval era.

This is why CWGH has been calling on government to urgently reconstitute the Advisory Board of the Public Health (PHAB) to ensure it gives sound advise to the Minister of Health and Child Care on matters relating to public health in the country including reviewing and providing input on laws, regulations and codes of practice on public health.

We are concerned that it is only the escapees that are named and shamed by publishing their names leaving out names of the security personnel that aid these escapees or those that were on duty that day. Why is it so easy to escape from a heavily-secured security cantonment area? We are greatly concerned that these escapees may be conniving with some of the security agents guarding the quarantine centres for their freedom.

It appears by naming and shaming the escapees we are trying to address the symptoms of the problem and definitely not the causes. What is needed is to address the underlying causes of the desertions. We further call upon the government to improve

living conditions in the country's quarantine centres, which have virtually become "prisons" and hotspots for COVID-19. Harrowing tales of hunger, rejection and stigmatisation which have resulted in fights and protests in some centres calls for government's urgent move to ensure the returnees are accorded decent living conditions.

The quarantine centres must have basic facilities – decent accommodation, enough food, blankets and cost of PCR testing must be carried by government. It is also the role of the government to ensure that all the returnees are tested for Covid -19 and it must not dump that responsibility to individuals. Sadly, some of the inmates may even get infected with Covid-19 whilst in the quarantine centres due to the poor observation of the social distancing measures, hand washing and generally poor hygiene standards.

The Community Working Group on Health (CWGH) is a network of national membership based civil society and community based organisations who aim to collectively enhance community participation in health in Zimbabwe.

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