

January 31 2013 at 01:02pm
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KZN Health Department MEC Sibongiseni Dhlomo, left, with McCord hospital board chairman Paulus Zulu and KZN Health head Sibongile Zungu, announce the government's takeover of the financially embattled hospital. Picture: Colleen Dardagan

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McCord Hospital would not close, but would become a state hospital with immediate effect. This was confirmed at a joint press conference meeting between the KwaZulu-Natal Health Department and the McCord leadership in Durban yesterday.

Provincial Health MEC Sibongiseni Dhlomo said the McCord board and management had accepted terms to convert it to a state-run institution.

He could not disclose how much the takeover would cost as that would be subject to process.

The KZN Health Department would immediately start the takeover.

He said that it had been financial constraints on the government and the termination of an international grant that had led to the financial crisis at the hospital.

Dhlomo said there was no evidence of financial mismanagement at McCord, and the provincial cabinet would be told of the takeover plan next week.

The acquisition process would be similar to the process in 2000 at St Mary's KwaMagwaza Hospital in Melmoth, which was formerly managed by the Anglican church and is now a state hospital.

There, the existing management was phased out and replaced by government recruits.

The McCord Hospital decision follows two weeks of bitter recriminations between the KZN Health Department and the hospital management.

The hospital's managers announced at the beginning of this month that it would close its doors at the end of March.



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to confirm whether or not it would continue financing the
ed last year. The deadline for notification, which was not

Then the head of department, Sibongile Zungu, announced that she would ask for a portion of the grant to be returned to government coffers. She said that services, paid for, had not all been received.

This threat spelt certain bankruptcy for the hospital as the chief executive, Kevin Smith, said it had budgeted to meet creditor debt.

A co-author of a new book on McCord, Catherine Burns, said the decision should make ordinary South Africans %afraid+.

%McCord has received international and national awards for being an excellently run hospital. It has survived for the past century because of excellent leadership.+

She said McCord Hospital, which received state aid, but was not controlled by the state, had autonomy which had allowed it to react quickly to the needs of its patients.

%McCord survived because it refused to bow to dictation. This takeover should strike fear into the hearts of ordinary South Africans, because (the) government has bullied the hospital, saying, ~~E~~ither get taken over by us or fail.qlt terrible,+she said.

The National Education Health and Allied Workers Union has called for heads to roll at the hospital, saying its management had delayed the government's move to take over the hospital last year.