

DENTAL LABS TARGETED

# Dentists nabbed in probe

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**M**ORE than 40 dentists, dental technicians and doctors in Durban could face criminal charges for defrauding the state and patients in various scams laid bare by two government investigations into the operations of dental laboratories and the Road Accident Fund.

Yesterday, the South African Dental Technicians' Council, which regulates the industry, charged technicians in Durban and pursued criminal charges against 44 dental surgeries.

This followed the announcement on Wednesday that fraud was costing the medical aid industry up to R12 billion a year.

Tebogo Dioka, an inspector with the council, has been in Durban for the past three days pouncing on laboratories selling inferior dentures to dentists who in turn charge their patients for high quality products and make huge profits.

In an operation at one Durban laboratory, Dioka charged the administration manager, who is not registered with the council, for polishing inlays for gold dentures.

"He is not qualified to do this kind of job. He is masquerading as a technician. Even students who come into the industry for training should be registered with the council," Dioka said.

The manager argued he had had more than 20 years of experience in the industry although he was not qualified.

"I am an administration manager here, but I do check the quality of the work from technicians.

"Sixty percent of my work is administration and 40% of the time I do inlays, which one need not be qualified to do," he said.

He conceded, however, that his laboratory was breaking the law by selling cheap dentures.

"But we have to discount them because we are selling to dentists in areas like Umlazi, Phoenix and Chatsworth, where most people do not have medical aid.

"We know about the provisions

of the Dental Technicians Act and I guess we are in contravention of its provisions," he said.

Dioka said: "You have a situation where a laboratory makes crowns for teeth which cost about R1 700 and sells them at R650.

"They compromise on the quality of the raw material by, in the case of gold, mixing gold with bronze with a higher ration of bronze than is required by law," he said.

In Umhlathuzana, a dental technician has opened a laboratory and has been acting as a dentist, seeing patients at night.

In Umlazi, the council nabbed a dentist who was supplying work to a Malvern laboratory and paying the latter in cash to hide the fact that he was getting discounts.

The council hopes to confiscate the service certificates of laboratories that have been found to be contravening the Dental Technicians Act instead of fining them R50 000 as provided by the same law.

The council is also hoping to rid the industry of unqualified technicians who are taking the jobs of newly qualified graduates.

## Unqualified

"Laboratories are employing unqualified people. They give them crash courses in dental technology and pay them R3 000 a month instead of paying young graduates a minimum of R12 000 a month.

"As a result, our dental technicians are poached by countries like Germany, which has set up dental laboratories in Dubai," said Dioka.

Meanwhile, the Commercial Road Accident Fund Investigation Team has arrested four doctors from Phoenix, Verulam and Pine-town on fraud charges.

One, Devandra Perumal, who was arrested in Pinetown, appeared in the Durban Magistrate's Court and was released on R30 000 bail.

The other three are due to appear in court on charges stemming from claims that they completed patients' cards and certificates, allowing people to claim from the fund without ensuring that they had been involved in accidents.