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A Kerry Cullinann

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voice of

Sister Gugu Majola has been a nurse in the public sector for 20 years, and for the past 10 years, she has specialised in psychiatric nursing. Currently, she is based at the Gateway Clinic at St Theresa’s Hospital in Mount Frere, a small town in the Eastern Cape.

“I like to deal with mental health problems because I have empathy; that love for people with such problems. I don’t like to see a person suffering,” says Majola, who completed a diploma in psychiatry in 1994.

*“Salary-wise, we are not paid as professionals. There is the scarce allowance. But this is mostly going to doctors. All nurses should be considered for this allowance because nurses are often the ones who orientate the doctors.”*

Gateway Clinic is an outpatient facility that deals both with the mentally ill and people in need of psychological help, including rape survivors and victims of trauma.

Aside from seeing patients, Majola also coordinates mental health matters for her sub-district.

It gives her job satisfaction to help her patients to deal with their problems, says Majola.

“But my job is made difficult by the negative attitude people have to mental health,” she adds. “Some of my colleagues describe mental patients as ‘your people’ as if they do not have anything to do with them. We are trying to remove

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# a nursing **Sister**

Gugu Majola

of Gateway Clinic at Mary Theresa's Hospital, in Mount Frere, the Eastern Cape

*"There is a work overload. Most of the people who have to go for disciplinary hearings because they did something wrong did so because of the stress and the overwork."*

that culture. Mental health services are not integrated into primary health care, although we are now trying to do that under the new Mental Health Act."

Majola says she has never considered leaving South Africa to work in another country.

"I grew up in a deep rural area so I am used to dealing with patients from rural areas. I love South Africa and do not intend to leave.

"Maybe when I am near pension age, I will go and work in the private sector to get more money," she adds with a laugh.

But then she becomes serious again as she says that, at times, "it seems as if nursing is not taken seriously as a profession".

The "gross shortage of staff" is another debilitating factor that makes working in the public sector more and more difficult.

Finally, says Majola, "the environment where we work is not conducive for nursing because it is dangerous".

*"Our clinic is right in the town. There is no safety and security for us. The security guards are not even armed."*