



qualification requirements. 'I'm sure we can come up with a way forward, once the RNN brings us their draft,' she added.

The petition circulated by the RNN claims there are more than 200 Congolese nurses waiting registration. 'We didn't choose to be refugees,' it adds.

Another hurdle for foreign-qualified applicants seems to be the council's insistence on recognising only the internationally recognised Test on English as a Foreign Language (Toefl) for fluency in English if the applicants' training was not in English. This is only available overseas and local institutions

such as the Language Laboratory and others are not deemed acceptable.

Council chief responds

Hasina Subedar, Chief Executive Officer of the nursing council, told *Izindaba* that the Congolese issue was 'complex and sensitive' and declined to discuss 'individual applications with the media'.

'Please don't jump to the wrong conclusions about the SANC based on very emotional and desperate applicants,' she said. Three top human rights bodies were monitoring matters and helping the refugees to 'come up with a proposal. Please allow us the

time and space to come up with a solution,' she added.

Asked why foreigners were not simply allowed to write the exam appropriate to their level of claimed expertise, she said it 'may be one of the options we're looking at', but declined to expand.

She said she did not think 'we can use foreigners to solve local problems'.

Subedar added that foreign applicants from the more developed Western countries were in a minority, 'so we're sitting with a bit of a problem' as South Africa had agreed not to recruit health care workers from developing countries.

Chris Bateman

A REFUGEE NURSE'S STORY...

Highly qualified Congolese refugee, Majiku Wamajiku, quit after working for two months without pay in Baragwanath Hospital's Neurosurgery ICU in April last year.

In spite of a letter confirming that he met the requirements for registration as a nurse and subsequently sitting for and passing the examination on ethos and professional practice, the SANC refused to register him.

Wamajiku met all council requirements (except for the English fluency initially, and currently verification of original qualification).

He had his letter of support from the health department's foreign workforce programme, but because his council registration remained 'imminent' pending verification of his Lumbumbashi University nursing diploma, he was unable to provide the Baragwanath paymaster with a registration number.

Now employed as a private caregiver in Bryanston, Wamajiku's ambitions of taking a local advanced ICU nursing course are on permanent hold until Council verifies his Congolese diploma.

'I had to borrow and beg for taxi money to commute to work at Bara until I found this job,' he told *Izindaba*.

This poor guy can't even advance his education, let alone work where he's most needed,' she said angrily.

Highly commended

His employer, Mrs Joanne Saner, describes him as a 'top grade' nurse who has given thoroughly professional care to first her late uncle who died of cancer, and now to her father who needed high care after a fall.

She met Wamajiku two years ago through a now defunct private nursing agency.

'When you try and get council to explain, they cite a piece of paper they gave him when he wrote his exam. First they lost it, then another was sent and now, for some reason the signatures don't match. This poor guy can't even advance his education, let alone work where he's most needed,' she said angrily.

The hoops foreign-qualified nurses need to jump through include providing certified copies of original documents, a letter of intent, a CV, a letter of support from the National department of Health Foreign Workforce Management Programme, a certified copy of their passport, an evaluation certificate from the South African Qualification Authority of the applicants' qualification, certified copies of professional qualification certificates, a valid licence to practise from the regulatory body of their country of origin, and proof of payment for the non-refundable fee of R375 per qualification.

If they manage all this, a panel of evaluators matches their qualification to equivalent local qualifications. If this succeeds, they then write the Nursing Act exam, which, if they pass, enables them to apply for registration of their qualification.

Only at this stage do they fill in a verification form for authentication by their home nursing council.

This costs an additional R364.

Chris Bateman