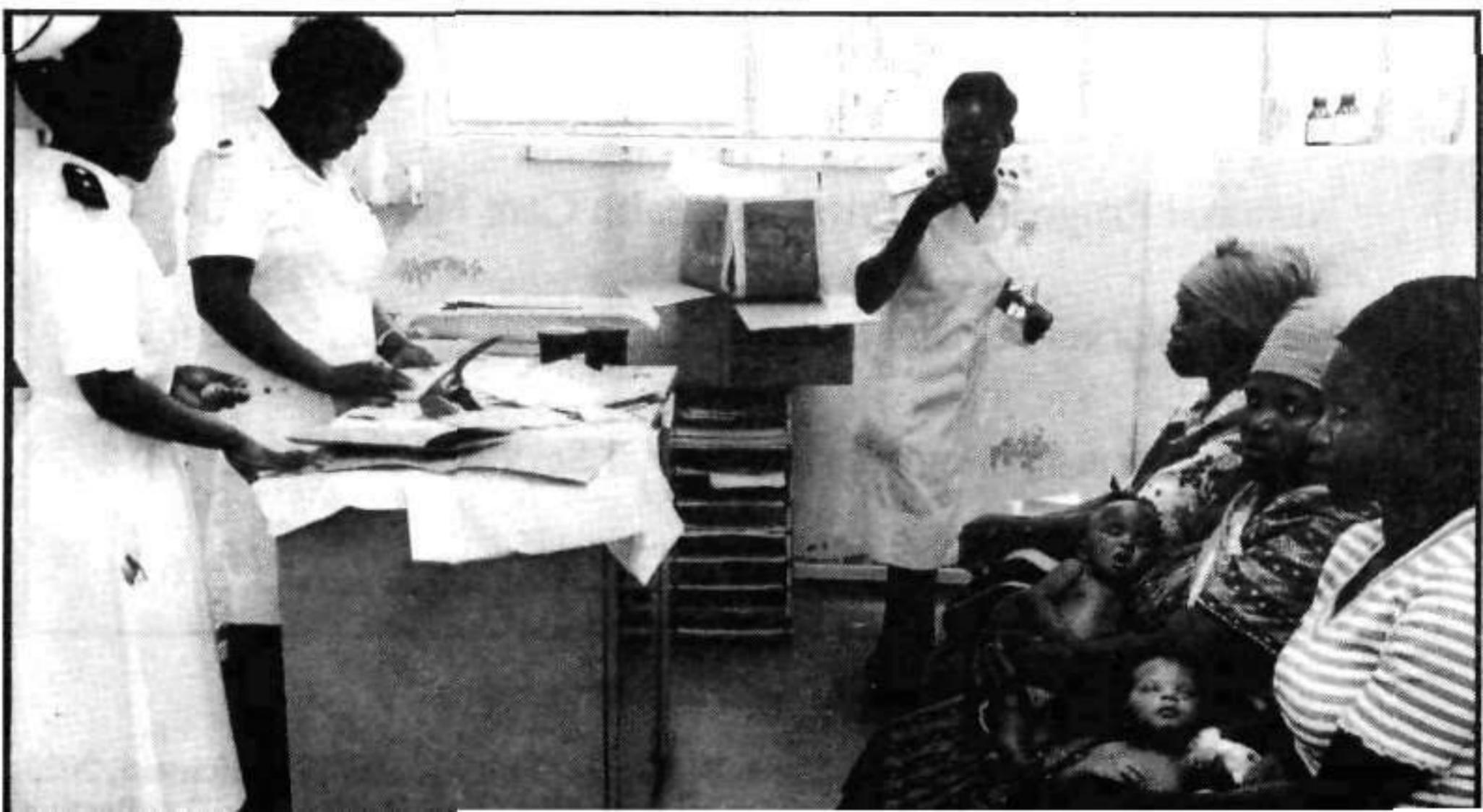


Editorial

There are a number of different groups organising within the health sector in South Africa - all of them united in their common abhorrence of apartheid and the effects that this system has on people's health. In March this year, the Health Workers Association (HWA) and the Health Workers Organisation (HWO) merged to form the South African Health Workers Congress (SAHWCO). This event prompted *Critical Health* to invite the different health worker organisations to reflect critically on their developments through a description of their origins and goals, a definition of the sectors within which they organise and an examination of their achievements and struggles. It was also an invitation for the different organisations to express their visions for the future. *Critical Health* hopes that the insight provided by these organisations in this edition will enlighten and encourage many of our readers, particularly those who do not yet belong to any of the organisations.

The different contributions provided clearly demonstrate that organisation within the health sector is complicated by the many different kinds of health workers from specialist doctors to unskilled domestic hospital workers. All represent different social and class interests and often express grievances that are conflicting and viewed with different priority.



A further complication and challenge has been the varying focus and priority that organisations have given to political issues affecting health workers, the economic and work problems experienced by health workers at the workplace and the health of the community at large. The position of the majority of health workers as state employees and as providers of an essential service has severely compromised the ability of health workers to show solidarity with the broader political struggles.

As individuals, health workers expressing their grievances have been faced with victimisation and intimidation by employers and "superiors". The strict hierarchies dominating the health sector make individual health workers vulnerable.

Organisation within the health sector is imperative. As part of an organisation, health workers have more strength to demand better working conditions as well as broader socio-political change.

It is apparent that a number of organisations exist, many of them overlapping in intent and function. The need for unity is clear and the way forward is being currently debated amongst the organisations themselves.

List of abbreviations

CSW - Concerned Social Workers

HWA - Health Workers Association

HWO - Health Workers Organisation

HWS - Health Workers Society

HWU - Health Workers' Union

NAMDA - National Medical and Dental Association

NEHAWU - National Education Health and Allied Workers Union

OASSSA - Organisation for Appropriate Social Services in South Africa

PPHCN - Progressive Primary Health Care Network

SAHWCO - South African Health Workers Congress