STRIKING DOCTORS TO GET NOVEMBER SALARIES

BY VISION REPORTERS

The executive director of Mulago National Referral Hospital, Dr Baterana Byarugaba, has said all doctors and intern medical students will be paid their November salaries despite the ongoing strike.

In an interview with *Sunday Vision*, Byarugaba said: "All the health workers, including those who are striking, will be paid not later than Wednesday next week."

The health facility has about 192 doctors on payroll. He explained that all the medical students doing internship at the facility have already been paid.

Byarugaba appealed to doctors and intern medical students, who have laid down their tools, to return to work, pending the salary review being undertaken by the public service ministry.

He also said the number of senior consultants at the facility will increase from 25 to 70.

"For those who have been complaining that they are not being promoted, the Government has expanded the structures for Mulago Hospital and, therefore, doctors are going to be promoted," Byarugaba said.

He added that the hospital has earmarked sh900m to purchase new vehicles for senior consultants and that senior nursing officer positions will be increased from 36 to 180.



A doctor attending to a patient in the emergency ward at Mulago Hospital, Kiruddu recently

DOCTORS WORK DESPITE STRIKES

Some medical doctors upcountry have refused to participate in the ongoing medical strike organised under their umbrella organisation, Uganda Medical Association (UMA).

UMA last week, on November 6, announced a sit-down strike of all doctors until the Government meets their demands that include better salaries and better equipped medical facilities.

A nurse at Nebbi Hospital, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the doctors at the hospital are working normally. The hospital has three medical officers, including the hospital superintendent.

"As I talk now, the two doctors are in the theatre," the nurse said.

Patients *Sunday Vision* spoke to said they were satisfied with work at the hospital.

"I do not understand this strike thing by the doctors. Maybe (the problem is) in another hospital, because here, a doctor has been treating me," Issa Rajab said.

Janet Giramia, a resident of Pubidhi in Nebbi municipality, whose daughter is admitted in the children's ward, said she has been visited twice by a doctor since admission on Wednesday.

Work at Tororo Hospital also remains uninterrupted amid the doctors' strike. Patients who talked to *Sunday Vision* on Friday said they had been attended to as scheduled.

In most of the wards, the medical personnel were attending to patients.

Earlier, Dr Thomas Ochar, the hospital's medical superintendent, confirmed that work was going on as usual because they value the lives of patients. He said the doctors were on standby to respond to any kind of emergency.

When contacted, UMA president Ekwaro Obuku said he was not aware that this was the case. He, however, said the development could be a result of some hospitals lacking enough staff such that only personnel responding to emergencies are available at the hospital.

All through the strike, he said UMA has asked some staff to remain at the hospitals to attend to emergencies.

"Some hospitals have one or two personnel, so most of the time they are deployed on emergency care. Those are some of the shortcomings of the health sector that we are fighting to address with this strike," he said.

He added, however, that if some of the doctors choose to defy their call, it is within their rights because their strike is not forced, but a voluntary action intended to make the Government to 'fix the ailing medical sector'

Flopped talks

A meeting between the striking doctors' and President Yoweri Museveni, which was scheduled to take place on Friday, flopped.

Doctors under UMA were expected to meet the President to forge a way forward.

The chairperson for ethics and professionalism of UMA, Dr Frank Asiimwe, told journalists on Friday that they would carry on with the strike until they speak to the President.

He, however, appealed to doctors to continue handling emergency medical and surgical services.

President Museveni had earlier threatened to sack the striking doctors, but they have instead appealed to the Government to leave all the avenues for talks open.

"We are not looking for jobs. We are speaking on behalf of Ugandans, who are tired of shortage of supplies in hospitals and our colleagues who are exposed every day to risks of contracting infections because stuff such as gloves are out of stock," Obuku insisted.

The strike has paralysed medical services in most parts of the country.

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