# Medics oppose proposal to import Cuban doctors

By Paul Kiwuuwa

Medical doctors under their umbrella body, Uganda Medical Association (UMA) are opposed to the plan by the health ministry to bring into the country 200 doctors from Cuba purportedly to bridge the manpower gaps across the country.

According to reports, the Cabinet constituted an adhoc committee chaired by health minister Dr Jane Aceng, to work out the details of the deal that would see the Government hire 200 Cuban doctors.

The proposal was mooted at the height of the doctors' industrial action and Cabinet discussed and gave it the green light, according to media reports.

Appearing before the parliamentary health committee yesterday, UMA's chairperson, Dr Ekwaro Obuku, said Uganda does not face scarcity of medical doctors because, annually, many medical doctors graduate with different specialties, who can be deployed in the government hospitals.

"We are working in very bad conditions, which expose our lives to more sicknesses. The hospitals lack the necessary medicines, supplies, hospital equipment, including the current information technologies for human operations. Sometimes, many patients die of preventable diseases, but due to lack of the necessary drugs, they die in our hands. We also want the Government to fulfill President Yoweri Museveni's promise to pay sh5.5m start pay for the medical doctors," Obuku said.

He was flanked by the vice-president of interns, Dr. Derick Bumba of the Hoima Regional Referral Hospital and Dr. Solomon Kyazze, the chairperson of senior house officers in Mulago Hospital.

Bumba asked the Government to fulfil its promise to pay the arrears of sh4.4b for senior consultants, who are working in government hospitals while studying for their master's degree programmes in various universities. Obuku told the committee that there is no serious epidemic or urgency, such as Ebola that would call for government to import Cuban doctors, adding that the country has got well-trained specialists and medical doctors to offer health services.

The committee chairperson, Dr. Michaeal Bukenya, said instead of importing doctors, the Government should motivate those in service.

"The committee on health, which is mandated to handle health-related issues will not back government's proposal to import medical doctors from Cuba, if brought to the House for debate," Bukenya said.

Ntwetwe County MP Joel Ssebikaali said the committee cannot back the proposal to import Cuban doctors when many Ugandan-trained medical doctors do not have jobs.

Ntungamo Woman MP Beatrice Rwakimaari wondered about the cost implication of the proposal.

"If the Government has failed to provide Ugandan medical doctors with good working conditions, good pay and accommodation, will it manage to pay the demands of the foreign medical doctors?"

Gulu Woman MP Betty Aol Ocan said the Government spends a lot of money in training its own doctors, and wondered why it shouldn't use the doctors to serve their country?

Last week, doctors agreed to return to work until December 16, when negotiations with the Government to improve their welfare are expected to be harmonised.

Scanned with CamScanner