Pre-internship exams will elevate medical standards

THE Government says it is introducing pre-internship examinations for medical students and tight admission requirements. The long-overdue move promises to transform the quality of medical professionals entering our health system. This approach, enshrined in the newly approved National Education and Training for Health Policy, represents the biggest overhaul of medical education since independence.

For too long, medical training has been characterised by inconsistencies. While institutions like Makerere University maintained rigorous standards, other universities admitted students with marginal qualifications, with some even accepting candidates with E grades in essential subjects like biology and chemistry, yet maintaining high standards during student selection is key to producing competent healthcare providers.

The introduction of pre-internship examinations is paramount in a country where some unscrupulous training institutions prioritise profit over quality. These standardised assessments will filter out "quack" students who may have cut corners during their academic journey but lack the fundamental knowledge required to practise medicine.

No longer will graduates automatically qualify for an internship based on university certification alone, as each is required to demonstrate competency through a national examination.

This reform addresses the commercialisation of medical education. For instance, there are universities admitting more students than their facilities can accommodate. Uganda will align with global best practices, where quality is non-negotiable, by requiring at least a B grade in essential subjects for medical degrees and implementing uniform pre-internship examinations.

Standardised assessments ensure graduates possess consistent knowledge regardless of institution, which improves patient safety nationwide. The examinations create accountability for training institutions, incentivising quality instruction rather than enrolment maximisation, and protect Ugandans from the consequences of substandard care.

The new framework is also expected to standardise the selection, deployment, and supervision of interns and to provide a specific plan to improve medical intern welfare.

These reforms, which prioritise competence over convenience in medical training, represent a countermeasure against the commercialisation of education, which has affected everything. They will also enable the country to have uniform minimum requirements for the admission of students to each of the health programmes.

With Uganda facing serious healthcare challenges, the country cannot afford to deploy underqualified practitioners who lack the skills to diagnose accurately, prescribe appropriately, or handle medical emergencies.

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