

Medical students to sit national exams

By Vivian Agaba

Starting next year, all medical students across the country will have to sit a mandatory unified examination at the end of their five-year training.

The students will do the examination before sitting their final examinations in their respective institutions.

The development was revealed by Associate Prof. Joel Hamilton Okullo, the chairperson of Uganda Medical and Dental Practitioners Council (UMDPC).

He was speaking at the sidelines during the inauguration of new UMDPC members the function took place at Fairway Hotel in Kampala yesterday.

The council constitutes eight members – Prof. Okullo, Prof. Harriet Kizza Mayanja, Dr Bernard Mathias Kiwanuka, Dr Juliet Amumpire Mwangi, Prof. Sarah Kiguli Walube, Dr Henry G. Mwebesa, Dr Arthur Kwizera and Dr Ntwatwa Lule.

Okullo explained that the council plans to introduce to the key stakeholders for their input. Then, if all goes according to plan, medical students will start sitting the examinations next year.

“The examination is aimed at testing the quality of doctors that have been trained from the various medical schools in the country, as well as improving the quality of medical practitioners to ensure they meet the medical standards,” he said.

“It is also to ensure there is uniformity in the standards of training of our doctors. Some training institutions are taking in students who do not qualify to be in medical schools, thus compromising the quality of doctors being produced. The plan to introduce a unified examination will happen in 2019,” he added.

Dr Diana Atwine, the permanent



Medical interns from Mulago Hospital in a 2016 demonstration demanding their pay. Medical students are set to start sitting the same examinations

secretary at the health ministry, confirmed that the ministry is studying the proposal. She, however, said all stakeholders would be consulted before it is passed.

BETWEEN THE LINES

■ The UMDPC is a professional organisation, established by an Act of Parliament, to license, monitor and regulate the practice of medicine and dentistry in the country.

Currently, nurses and midwives sit the Uganda Nurses and Midwives Examinations Board (UNMEB) national examinations for purposes of improving human resource for health

in the country.

There are about 10 medical schools in the country. It is estimated that each year, about 320 medical students graduate from Ugandan universities, the highest number in East Africa, but the problem of brain drain still remains high in the country.

There have been complaints that the quality of doctors is declining over the years. Some countries, including Kenya, have queried the quality of doctors from some private universities in Uganda.

What others say

The state minister for higher education, Dr John Muyingo, has divergent views on this national examination.

He said over examining and evaluating the medical students will

not change anything, but emphasis should be put on what students are admitted for which programme. Who should teach them and how best to teach them, so that they come out as the best product.

Muyingo said it is important for the council to sit with the education ministry officials, universities and senates to discuss the best ways to improve the quality of doctors, other than over-examining the students.

“Over-evaluating the students without proper teaching is like over-milking a cow without feeding it. Exams are too many; let us identify problems leading to the poor quality of doctors, work together to fix them and produce the best quality doctors,” Muyingo said.

Dr Sabrina Kitaka, a senior lecturer,

department of paediatrics, Makerere University is in support of the proposal, saying it will play a key role in standardising medical education in the country.

Giving examples of countries such as Britain, the US and Ghana, Kitaka noted that it is mandatory for medical students in these countries to sit the national examination, which assesses the doctor's ability to apply knowledge, concepts and principles and demonstrate fundamental patient-centred skills that are important for health and disease.

“Students who pass the national examinations in these countries are certified in their areas of expertise and can practice anywhere in the world.”

“I support the proposal, which if implemented, will improve the standard of our doctors,” she said.

On the other hand, she urged the council to work with the National Council for Higher Education and medical professionals to look at the curriculum and ensure it is standardised.

Dr Johnson Richard Kubuziga, a medical officer in Mubende district, said the recent cases of incompetence among medical officers means either training institutions are not doing their work or medical students do not care to grasp the skills and the theory being taught.

He said by introducing the national examination, it will help to awaken the institutions to do their work effectively, and students to take their studies seriously, since they deal with human life.

Opendi speaks out

While officiating at the inauguration, the state minister of health in charge of general duties, Sarah Opendi said the health ministry is soon releasing guidelines to regulate health camps in the country.