

NMS, heart institute cry out for more funding

By Moses Mulondo

Heads of key health institutions – the National Medical Stores (NMS), Mulago National Referral Hospital and the Uganda Heart Institute have appealed to Parliament to ensure that they are allocated more funds in the national budget, in order to execute their mandates more effectively.

The three were among the various entities under the health sector, which appeared before Parliament's health committee, to defend their budget proposals for the 2018/2019 financial year.

The Mulago Hospital executive director, Dr George Baterena Byarugaba, said whereas the national referral hospital needs about sh100b for drugs and medical supplies, it is allocated only sh14.4b.

"Our patients do not get all the necessary drugs because our budget for the drugs is small. We would do much better if our budget were increased," Byarugaba said.

On medical research, Byarugaba said, the ideal budget would be about sh10b, but are only allocated sh400m for the vote.

Regarding the expenditure on the food for the patients, Byarugaba said they are allocated sh4b and, because the budget is small, sh2,000 is spent on each patient for breakfast, lunch and supper.

"Feeding is part of treatment. At least, if our budget could be increased to sh4,000 per patient for food, the situation would be much better," he said.

The committee chairperson, Dr Michael Bukenya, said: "You said Kiruddu and Kawempe hospitals are supposed to operate at the level of referral hospitals, but you did not budget for them in the 2018/2019 budget."

Sarah Opendi, the health state minister, said they had submitted the budgets for the two hospitals, but the finance ministry had not allocated them any money.

The minister explained that from the

costing they had done, they need sh5b and sh3.5b for Kawempe and Kiruddu respectively, to keep running.

Opendi also said since the two hospitals were part of the loan to reconstruct Mulago and decongest it, equipment had been procured for them.

The director of the Uganda Heart Institute, Dr John Omagino, said the fact that they had conducted successful heart surgeries, means if they are funded adequately to have their home built and to get all the necessary facilities, there would be no need for Ugandans to go abroad for heart-related complications.

"Uganda is the only country where a cardiologist is paid a meagre monthly salary of \$1,000 (about sh3.6m). That is why many of our health experts keep running to other countries," Omagino said.

The National Medical Stores executive director, Moses Kamabare, commended the Government for allocating his entity an extra sh46b in next budget, but argued that they are still underfunded.