

**Dangers.** Mr Mufumba says shunning drugs causes relapse among patients.

BY PHILIP WAFULA & DENIS EDEMA  
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

# Lack of drugs affecting mental health treatment

**KAMPALA.** Mental health patients at Jinja Regional Referral Hospital have started shunning treatment and routine check-up due to persistent lack of drugs at the facility.

The patients also decry the high costs of transport involved while seeking treatment.

According to the hospital reports, the facility receives about 40 referred mentally ill patients every day from Busoga Sub-region and about 60 from central region.

Mr Emmanuel Mufumba, a senior nursing officer at Buwenge General Hospital, says shunning medicine can be fatal for the patient.

"Medicine is supposed to be taken on a regular basis otherwise someone can end up getting an attack for cases such as epilepsy," he said, recounting a fateful scenario that recently befell a community in Wairaka, in the outskirts of Jinja Town.

"One of our clients recently shunned treatment due to religion. Incidentally, pastors told him that his epileptic seizures were the work of 'evil spirits' and he stopped taking medicine. Unfortunately, he passed on a month ago," Mr Mufumba recounts.

Shunning medicine, Mr Mufumba adds, can also bring about relapse.

A relapse, he explains, is an illness that returns especially after a patient has shown signs of recovery or improvement.

He further noted that when mentally ill patients default, they get more depressed with many becoming excessively violent to an extent of causing serious bodily injury to themselves.

He notes that besides poverty, most mental health patients, especially in Busoga Sub-region shun treatment because of stigma, side effects and complacency.

## Voices

"Mental health treatment is very expensive. When you factor in transport, it discourages a caretaker from transporting his or her patient. By the time we come here, we expect to get drugs, which are not in other hospitals. Unfortunately, that is not the case,"

BOSCO MALE, CARE-TAKER

"Some patients, especially those with depression, are given drugs for three months or a lifetime. It is therefore only advisable for such patients to be stopped by a medical person,"

PROF EUGENE KINYANDA, PSYCHIATRY CONSULTANT

"Most patients loathe the reality of being seen openly taking drugs meant for the mentally ill; while some drugs have long-lasting side effects. Then others are simply complacent, reasoning that they will swallow these tablets until they die," he says.

"I appeal to all our members, patients and clients not to stop taking



**Drugs.** Officials from National Medical Stores and Jinja District security committee inspect a consignment of drugs that were delivered to Jinja Regional Referral Hospital in 2016. Mental health patients at the facility have started shunning treatment due to persistent drug stock outs. FILE PHOTO



**Affected.** A street preacher prays for a mentally ill person in Jinja Town recently.

PHOTO BY DENIS EDEMA

their medication," he added.

Prof Eugene Kinyanda, a psychiatry consultant at Mulago hospital, says: "Some patients, especially those with depression are given drugs for three months or a lifetime. It is therefore only advisable for such patients to be stopped by a medical person," he says.

Regarding stock-outs for health mental patients, Prof Kinyanda calls for the availability of drugs in facilities, saying some drugs are expensive for patients to afford.

Mr Bosco Male, a care-taker of a mental health patient in Buwenge Town Council, says lack of drugs at the facility has forced him to always return his patient home as he is told to come back the following week.

Shs25,000 and Shs30,000 on transport from Buyende to Jinja and back. So, why should I continue bringing a patient to hospital yet he will not receive treatment? We rather stay home." Some of the drugs reportedly missing at the facility include Carbamazepine, Stelazine, Trifluperazine, Haltodeco and Flupherazine among others.

## NMS speaks out

But the National Medical Stores spokesperson, Mr Dan Kimosho, yesterday told *Daily Monitor* that drugs for mental health, which were ordered have been delivered.

"We serve according to the order. There is what they plan for at the beginning of every financial year. Then, every after two months, we get an order that is derived from their procurement plan. In fact, when they tender in a request, we honour it according to their order and budget," Mr Kimosho said.

"I wonder why patients are shunning treatment yet the drugs were delivered and they are supposed to access them at no cost," he added.

A survey across selected pharmacies in Jinja Town, indicated that a single Halto deco injection goes for Shs39,000 while an injection of Flupherazine goes for Shs12,000.

However, in an interview with *Daily Monitor*, the hospital administrator, Mr Mubarak Were, denied that drugs are unavailable at the facility.

"There are situations when a doctor prescribes drugs for a patient depending on the stage of sickness which requires other drugs that are not supplied by NMS. These would require patients to buy them elsewhere," he said.

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THE NUMBER OF MENTALLY ILL PATIENTS REFERRED TO JINJA HOSPITAL EVERY DAY

## Treatment costs

"Mental health treatment is very expensive. When you factor in transport, it discourages a caretaker from transporting his or her patient. By the time we come here, we expect to get drugs which are not in other hospitals. Unfortunately, that is not always the case," he says.

Adding: "I spend between