

Health industry: What stood out in 2016

The year 2016 was quite eventful in the health industry. As we welcome the New Year, we look back at the events that made news and the impact they have had.

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On March 27, Uganda's only Co-60 radiotherapy machine broke down beyond repair, leaving more than 2,000 cancer patients without proper treatment. The process for procuring a new machine has been delayed up to around March due to absence of a bunker to house the machine.

According to Dr Jackson Orem, the director Uganda Cancer Institute, a number of patients have been taken to Aga Khan University Hospital for radiotherapy following the memorandum of understanding that was signed between the Aga Khan University Hospital and the Uganda Cancer Institute. As a result of the July 8 MoU, about 35 patients have already received treatment from the health facility. Another 90 patients have been lined up.



Sickle Cell conference

On June 4, Uganda hosted delegates from more than 15 countries. The conference was aimed at raising the profile of sickle cell disease, which has been largely neglected over the years in Sub-Saharan Africa. They included scientists, clinicians, policy makers, researchers, advocacy groups, technology and pharmaceutical companies from around the world at the 6th International Sickle Cell conference at Hotel Africana in Kampala.

HIV/AIDS household survey

On August 24, the Ministry of Health launched the Uganda Population based HIV Impact Assessment Survey (UPHIA). The nationwide household survey will help in

estimating HIV incidence, prevalence and viral load, suppressors among adults and children, test positive accurate national and regional level data on the magnitude and dynamics of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the country and will be used in planning for the response to the epidemic. Currently, the HIV/AIDS prevalence stands at 7.3 per cent based on the Uganda Demographic Health Survey conducted in 2011.

Gavi Grant for staff houses

On September 26, the Ministry of Health under the Health Systems Strengthening Programme received Shs15.5b from the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation - GAVI Alliance for construction of 27 staff houses and 10 medical stores in 33 selected districts.

Hepatitis B vaccination

About 3.5 million people are living with Hepatitis B in Uganda. Unfortunately, most sufferers are unaware they have the disease.

According to the Ministry of Health, Uganda is a highly endemic country with a 10 per cent national prevalence of Hepatitis B infection. However, the rates vary across the country from four per cent in the southwest to 25 per cent in the Northeast.

Karamoja is the most afflicted region, standing at 23.9 per cent, followed by Northern Uganda (20 per cent), West Nile (19 per cent), Rwenzori region (10 per cent), Eastern region (7.1 per cent), Kampala (5.3 per cent), and the South Western region at (3.8 per cent).

Hepatitis B, according to a pocket guide developed by the Uganda Gastroenterology Society (UGES) on care and treatment for the disease is transmitted through exposure to infected blood and various body fluids such as menstrual, vaginal, and seminal fluids. The guide indicates that it can spread from an infected mother to the baby during childbirth.

As the country readies itself to eliminate the disease by 2030 as endorsed by World Health Organisation, the fight remains hobbled with limited awareness, inadequate screening services and unavailability of treatment for those who test positive.

The challenge is that there are no proper referral systems and care centres for patients for Hepatitis B. The cost for a one month's dose of Hepatitis B drugs is Shs35,000.

Mr Moses Kamabare, the National Medical Stores general manager, said three doses are needed if the on-going immunisation campaign is to be effective. Currently, there is a deficit of about Shs10b to procure the last dose of Hepatitis B vaccines and so far, 39 districts in northern Uganda have already received their first and second doses of the vaccine.

Refurbished hospitals

On May 4, President Museveni commissioned the newly refurbished Entebbe Hospital. It is one of the nine beneficiary health facilities in the first phase of the Uganda Health Systems Strengthening Project supported by the World Bank, China.

National Aero-technology International Engineering Corporation was contracted to construct this facility \$ 7,034,065.42. However, after a few months of operations, an audit report done by the State House Health Monitoring Unit indicated that the floor of the hospital had been poorly done resulting in flooding. Other hospitals that got a facelift include: Moroto Regional Referral Hospital, Mityana I, Iganga, Kiryandongo, Anaka, Nebbi, Moyo and Nakaseke hospitals.

Outrightly disgusting

Another Global Fund scam

In March, a new audit report by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) based in Geneva, Switzerland revealed another global fund plunder of \$3.9m (about Shs13.1b) in inflated costs for anti-malaria drugs or lack of accountability. The former Minister of Health, Dr Elioda Tumwesigye, apologised for the mishaps, saying there was an improvement in accountability. However, the report also indicated that the funds were not being absorbed.



Yellow Fever cards for travel

In March, the Ministry of Health issued a requirement of all passengers using the airport and other border entry points to present certificates of immunisation against yellow fever. This was after one person died of the disease in neighbouring Kenya and about 200 in Angola. Up-to-date, the requirement still stands.



Injectable polio vaccine

On April 20, the then Minister of State in charge of Primary Health Care, Sarah Opendi launched the introduction of Injectable Polio Vaccination into routine immunisation at an event held in Bulambuli District.



Laboratories accreditation

On October 28, the Ministry of Health announced the enlisting of 16 hospitals for international accreditation. This brings the number of internationally accredited laboratories in Uganda to 21. The 16 hospital laboratories enlisted for International Accreditation include: CPHL EID/ viral load laboratory - Kampala, Mildmay Uganda - Wakiso, Nsambya Hospital - Kampala, Mbale Regional Referral Hospital - Mbale, Mulago National Referral Hospital -

Kampala, Fort Portal Regional Referral Hospital - Kabarole, Lira Regional Referral Hospital - Lira, Masaka Regional Referral Hospital - Masaka, Mbarara Regional Referral Hospital - Mbarara, Arua Regional Referral Hospital - Arua, Kiryandongo General Hospital - Kiryandongo, Entebbe General Hospital - Wakiso, Kayunga General Hospital - Kayunga, Masindi General Hospital - Masindi and Atuturi General Hospital - Kumi.

Uganda exports ARVs to Namibia

In April, Uganda's pharmaceutical firm, Cipla Quality Chemical Industries exported the first consignment of HIV/AIDS drugs worth \$4m (about Shs13.4b) to Namibia, making it probably the largest order of ARV medicines out of East Africa.



Immunisation Law

On March 10, President Museveni assented to the Immunisation Law, which criminalises parents who refuse to have their children vaccinated with a six-month jail term. It requires every child to possess an immunisation card in order to access education. The new law also created an Immunisation Fund. However, Dr Bernard Opar, the programme manager, Uganda National Expanded Programme on Immunisation, says they are still working on regulations to enable the implementation of the law.