

Rapid malaria tests taken to villages

WHY TAKE THE STEP?

Statistics from the Ministry of Health show that malaria is still the leading cause of death in Uganda, accounting for over 27% of deaths

By Pascal Kwesiga

The Ministry of Health has introduced a raft of laboratory screening services, including rapid malaria and hepatitis B testing at health centre IIs in the new clinical guidelines.

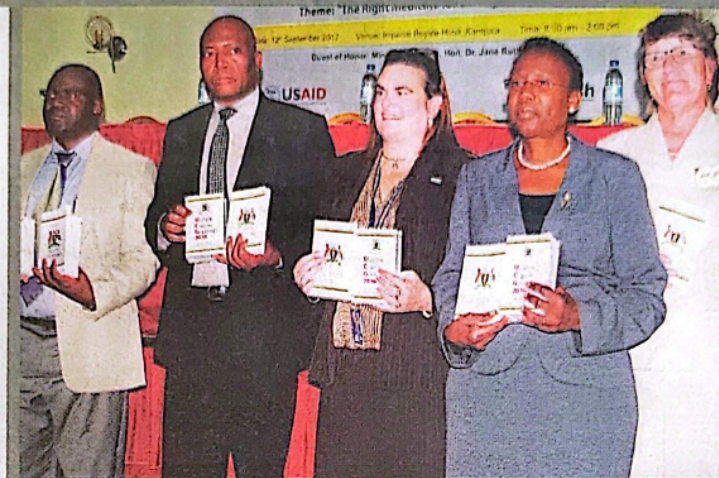
Health centre IIs, based at parish level, remain the best alternative stop-centres for the initial use of public healthcare services before proceeding to health centre IIIs based at the sub-county level, according to a 2014 health ministry baseline study in 16 districts of Uganda.

The ministry, in the Uganda clinical guidelines 2016, has also introduced over 30 new laboratory test services at health centre IIIs, including sickle cell screening, stool and urinalysis, Brucella, hepatitis B and C rapid test and typhoid testing.

At the health centre IVs, the patients are now expected to access about 20 laboratory services, including full blood count (a broad test to check several diseases), Thrombin clotting time (a blood test to measure time it takes for a clot to form in the plasma of blood) and Prothrombin time (a test measuring how long it takes for blood to clot).

Health centre IVs

Additional lab services at health centre IVs include high vaginal swab and wound swab analysis and Gene Xpert for tuberculosis screening as well as Cerebrospinal fluid (testing diseases affecting the brain and spinal cord). However, to enforce the new guidelines, the Government will have to establish the infrastructure and



(L-R) World Health Organisation representative Joseph Mwoga; director of clinical services Charles Olar; deputy director USAID health and HIV/AIDS office Michelle Lang-Ali; Aceng and chief of party for USAID Birna Trap launching the guidelines in Kampala yesterday. Photo by Mary Kansiime

procure equipment and testing materials.

The guidelines have also introduced a myriad of new lab tests at the general district hospitals, including, coagulation screening to assess blood clotting in patients, direct and indirect coombs tests taken during prenatal screening of pregnant women and in testing blood prior to a blood transfusion.

Additional tests for referral hospitals

Under the latest guidelines launched by the ministry in Kampala yesterday, the regional referral hospitals are also expected to perform several additional tests such as reticulocyte count and tests (a test to measure the level of reticulocytes - immature blood cells - in blood), semen analysis, swab analysis, blood culture, and fungal identification tests.

Until yesterday, health workers were expected to use the guidelines last updated in 2012. Countries update the treatment guidelines to, among others, appropriately respond to emerging health

CHALLENGE

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heart institutes, too, have additional tests to run under the new guidelines.

The new list of essential medicines and health supplies for Uganda, which was also unveiled yesterday by the ministry, features drugs that health workers have previously administered to patients, but this time, they have been strengthened by changing the formulae and ingredients. The list contains over 140 essential medicines.

The health minister, Dr Ruth Aceng, said the new drug combinations and lab services that have been introduced mirror the World Health Organisation recommendations. She explained that the updated guidelines present practical and useful information regarding diagnosis and management of common health conditions in Uganda.

"The guidelines provide a rational basis for an efficient procurement and supply system that ensures the availability of safe, efficacious, quality medicines and health supplies," Aceng stated.

The acting director general of health services, Prof. Anthony Mbonye, explained that the guidelines evolved from the national standard treatment (guidelines) that were published in 1993.

"The purpose of the national standard treatment guidelines is to provide evidence-based, practical and implementable guidance to prescribers to offer the most cost-effective and affordable treatment of priority health conditions," he added.

The Kiruhura district director of health services, Dr Ivan Kanya, asked the ministry to disseminate the guidelines to all health workers and facilities across the country for effective utilisation

THE BIGGER PLAN

Countries update the treatment guidelines to among others, appropriately respond to emerging health threats and epidemics

threats, epidemics and changing health trends and patterns of disease outbreaks and attacks.

The guidelines were prepared by the health ministry in a period of six months with funding from the USAID-funded Uganda Health Supply Chain and Clinton Health Access Initiative.

Mulago and Butabika hospitals are also required to perform various extra tests to determine, among others, inflammation in blood and several infections and diseases in the blood.

The specialised labs at the cancer and