Pre-internship examination for medics useless, says Prof Buga

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KAMPALA. The government's plan to subject final year medical students to mandatory pre-internship examination is "disruptive and unnecessary" and will be counter-productive, a medical professor has said.

"That you should do exams after you have completed the course! What will that help?" wondered Geoffrey Buga, a professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at Nelson Mandela Academic Hospital and Walter Sisulu University in Eastern Cape. Prof Buga also serves as an external examiner for graduate and doctoral students at Makerere University's College of Health sciences.

In the interview at his home in Ntinda, a Kampala suburb, on Friday, Prof Buga added: "These [medical students who will fail pre-entry exams] are people who are going to operate illegally anyway; it [pre-internship examination] is going to create criminals out of people who have actually studied the course."

Health Minister Ruth Aceng last September said the revised guidelines aim to sieve out the unsuitable students before hands-on practice, restructure the internship programme and control the numbers.

This followed complaints about the competence of some recent medical graduates and, separately, incessant strikes by interns over unpaid allowances that exposed the government to public ridicule.

The court halted implementation of the pre-internship examination after some disaffected students sued the government.

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Prof Buga said instead of waiting to act at the last minute, the government must strengthen routine supervision to ensure rigorous adherence to standards at the training institutions throughout the five-year course.

"I think they are wrong [on pre-internship examination]; they are being superficial. The entire process of training [medical professionals] should be streamlined," he said, adding: "There should be a clear-cut method of how the medical curriculum is executed."

The one-year internship for medical students is essential for their licensing and or accreditation to practice as doctors in the country. Concerns about quality forced the Law Development Centre, and later Makerere University School of Law, to introduce pre-entry examinations to ensure only the most competent got admitted even if they had scored well at the preceding academic level.

Prof Buga said last Friday that if the government is unyielding on its proposal for additional examinations for medical examinations, it should work with all institutions training medical professionals to ensure they set and administer a final national qualifying examination the same way it is done for candidate classes at primary and secondary

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