

Kadaga calls for training more specialised doctors

By Moses Mulondo

The Speaker of Parliament, Rebecca Kadaga and the state minister for health, Sarah Opendi, have called for the prioritisation of training, recruitment and enhanced remuneration for specialised doctors in the country.

Kadaga and Opendi were yesterday responding to concerns about the few specialised doctors, such as neurosurgeons and eye doctors (ophthalmologists) in the country.

This was at the opening of the four-day international conference for eye specialists from Africa, Asia, the US and Europe, yesterday at Munyonyo Commonwealth Resort under the theme, "Teamwork in Eye Care".

The president of the Uganda Ophthalmology Society, Dr Grace Ssali Nsibirwa, informed the participants that many African countries, including Uganda have few specialised doctors. Nsibirwa said Uganda has only 40 ophthalmologists attending to close to 40 million people.

The chairperson of the conference Dr Anne Ampaire Musika, who works with Makerere University's College of Health Sciences, reported that five out of the 15 regional hospitals which include Kabaale, Masaka, Mubende, Hoima and Karamoja do not have a single eye specialist.

"Because we have inadequate ophthalmologists in the country, it means that roughly, each one of us has to attend to over one million people and yet, the desired international target is that, each ophthalmologist



(Left to right) Opendi, Kadaga, Ssali and Matende at Speke Resort Munyonyo yesterday. Photo by Miriam Namutebi

should be attending to 250,000 people," Musika remarked.

In their report, conference conveners attributed the low levels of specialised doctors to limited government support for training and funding to eye care professionals.

They also asked the Government and Parliament to expedite the process of enacting a law, which would allow organ transplants, such as the cornea transplants, which prevent blindness.

The conference, the fifth of its kind, was organised by the College of Ophthalmology of Eastern, Central and Southern Africa (COECSA).

The newly elected COECSA president, Dr Ibrahim Matende from South Africa, who has taken over from Dr Hassan Kunle from Nigeria, urged African governments to fund efforts to increase the number of eye specialists and other specialised

doctors, if they care about the lives of their citizens. "It is worrying that Uganda has only 40 ophthalmologists attending to 40 million people. We need to increase ophthalmologists in our countries. We challenge African governments to increase funding in this health sphere. Eyesight problems affect productivity. We also ask governments to enact laws to allow cornea transplants," Matende appealed.

Kunle expressed dismay that most African governments have not given priority to training sufficient specialised doctors, which is endangering the lives of Africans.

He revealed that Nigeria leads with 550 ophthalmologists, South Africa has 360, while Mozambique has the lowest number on the continent with only four ophthalmologists.

Speaking after the outpouring of concerns from the experts, Opendi contended that

it is indeed high time the Government prioritised funding to enhance training for specialised doctors. She also spoke about the need for improving the welfare of the specialists.

Opendi revealed that the health ministry is drafting the Organ Transplant Bill, which is expected to be enacted into a law before this year ends.

"We are also in advanced stages of turning Mulago Referral Hospital into a specialised hospital and when this work is complete, referrals abroad for patients with eye diseases will become history," she promised.

Kadaga assured the participants that she would implore Parliament to start a robust campaign for the Government to increase funds and efforts for training specialised doctors in the country.