

Pharmacy Week

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From research to healthcare

Measures. The pharmaceutical sector is instituting measures to enable pharmacies screen drugs and the supply chain to ensure that drugs are sourced from trusted sources and are verified.

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Uganda's pharmaceutical sector growing steadily

Pharmacists in Uganda have appealed to the government to invest in research if the country's pharmaceutical sector is to register remarkable growth.

Mr Samuel Opio, the secretary of Pharmaceutical Sector of Uganda (PSU) says in the past 10 years, PSU has experienced an increase in numbers of pharmacies from 450 to more than 1,000 pharmacies nationwide.

PSU is the professional body of pharmacies in Uganda. It aims at promoting the highest standards of pharmacies in the country.

Growing

"The number of pharmacies has more than doubled and this is important in improving health service delivery. The desired ratio according to the World Health Organisation standards has been one pharmacist to 100,000 people (1:100,000). Currently, in Uganda, it is one pharmacist to 40,000 people, (1:40,000)," Mr Opio says.

This according to Mr Opio, shows that the number of people who access pharmacies and pharmaceutical services has increased in the country.

He says the public sector has engineered the growth of pharmacies compared to 10 years ago, when the National Drug Authority (NDA) experienced challenges of ensuring quality of pharmacies because there was no human resource capacity.

"When the supply chain improved, it led to easy access to pharmaceuticals. Issues to do with drug shortages and reduction ceased to exist. There was improved drug quantification, procurement and utilisation. Pharmacies ventured into research in herbal medicines and there was pharmacy involvement in clinical or patient management and care," Mr Opio says.

Counterfeit drugs

In order to eliminate counterfeit medicines in pharmacies, PSU conducts supervisory visits every quarter as one of the measures to maintain practiced standards of pharmacies.

The sector is also instituting measures to enable pharmacies screen drugs and the supply chain to ensure that drugs are sourced from trusted sources and that they are verified.

Challenges

Mr Opio says many people think that pharmacies are places that sell



A pharmacist explains drugs to people during the World Pharmacist Day in Kampala recently.

PHOTO BY GODFREY LUGAAJU

drugs yet they stretch from development of a drug, manufacture, distribution, dispensing, provision of drug information, evaluation of prescriptions, monitoring drug effects, identifying drug interactions and ensuring patient safety during the course of treatment.

"There is a need for the public to be aware of these services to enable optimisation of treatment. If these services are utilised, drug wastage can be avoided. The cost of treatment as a result of wrong medication can be curbed, drug shortages can be mitigated and new medicines developed," he says.

He adds that there is lack of engagement of pharmacists at clinical or ward level where patient management takes place.

In Uganda, it is one pharmacist allocated to serve one hospital, unlike other countries such as Japan, US and UK where Mr Opio says it is one pharmacist to serve 50 hospital beds. He says there is a need for government to employ more pharmacists.

There is also a rational dispensing, prescribing better treatment outcome. Most districts have district health officers and veterinary

officers but there are no district pharmacists to oversee pharmaceutical services. There are no national drug research institutes in Uganda and yet countries that have developed have research institutes. There needs to do pharmaceutical research to tap into the medicinal

potential of herbs we have," he says.

He adds: "Forty years ago, India imported 90 per cent of its medicines and was manufacturing less than 10 per cent. Currently, the country produces more than 90 per cent and import less than 10 per

cent and have come to be known as the pharmacy of the world. It is time for Uganda to adopt this model to become the pharmacy for Africa by strengthening research because we have the potential."

Future plans

Mr Patrick Ogwang, the president of PSU says the sector is currently focusing on training members to improve on their ability to do research.

"We already have a laboratory to do research on both modern and local medicines. We believe we can make medicines for Uganda and the outside world and this will provide employment to pharmacists and non-pharmacists," Mr Ogwang explains.

At hospital level, he says the sector is engaging government to create structures to accommodate pharmacies so that every hospital can have at least two to three pharmacies.

"We are collaborating with the East African Community (EAC) to harmonise pharmacy practice so that if our members go to any of the EAC member states, they are able to practice their profession



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