

Hospitals struggle as blood banks run dry



Crisis. Blood is sorted out at a collection centre in Kampala. Some health facilities handle only emergency cases due to blood shortage. PHOTO BY STEPHEN OTAGE

Nelson Obote, the spokesperson, who sits at Mulago, and occasionally visits the hospital.

When asked about the situation, he said: "I don't know. I am not at Kirudu hospital, but I will update you tomorrow (today) when I visit the hospital to assess the situation."

At Fort Portal regional blood bank, the machine for screening the blood broke down five

months ago, worsening the situation.

The regional centre had collected 367 units of blood in the last one week, but could not screen it there.

The regional manager, Dr James Ngobi, said the centre has high demand, yet the supply has run out.

Dr Ngobi said they have to wait for the national blood

bank at Nakasero in Kampala to screen the blood before it can be taken back for use, which is expensive and time consuming.

He said they are supposed to collect 2,000 units of blood monthly, but have always been collecting only 800 units and less every month.

At Masaka Regional Referral Hospital and other facilities within the catchment area, the situation was normal.

At Kalangala Health Centre IV, Dr Michael Suuna, the superintendent, said they have enough blood because the demand is low.

He said they usually use an average of 5 units of blood monthly because of few casualties and referrals to Masaka hospital.

Mr Ayubu Mutebi, the greater Masaka regional blood bank manager, said: "In Lyantonde, we don't have any blood bank, but we still have enough in our store; the said storm in other parts of the country has not yet affected us."

By Franklin Draku, Scovia Atuhaire & Henry Lubulwa

BLOOD COLLECTION DRIVE BOOSTED

Following the crisis across the country, the Uganda Blood Transfusion Services launched an impassioned campaign to raise more blood to address the shortages. Last week, the bank collected up to 5,250 units of blood to supply the health facilities. An official from the blood bank said they exceeded the target needed for the week but added that it would not solve the

long-term crisis. Dr Dorothy Kyeyune Byabagaire, the executive director of the Uganda Blood Transfusion Services, said the response to their public appeal was overwhelming.

Meanwhile, Finance and Health ministries have pledged to provide funds to the Uganda Blood Transfusion Services to ensure hospitals do not run out of blood supplies.