

# TRANSFER OF MEDICAL DOCTORS SPARKS UPROAR

BY VISION REPORTER

The Government has transferred over 300 medical workers in a massive reshuffle, which has sparked uproar from members of Uganda Medical Association (UMA), but described as normal by the health ministry.

In the list of transferred consultants, medical and anaesthetic officers, a copy of which *Sunday Vision* has seen, some personnel were transferred to far-flung areas in the country.

Those transferred include senior consultants in different fields, such as internal medicine, surgery, anaesthesia and orthopaedics.

In an interview with *Sunday Vision*, the permanent secretary of the ministry of health, Dr Diana Atwine, said the transfers are aimed at redistributing the available personnel and would take immediate effect.

"As soon as our officers receive the official communication about the transfers, they are required to relocate to their new work stations," Atwine said.

On whether the transferred medical officers expect facilitation from the ministry to relocate, Atwine said the Public Service Standing Orders should guide the process.

## DO NOT SPECULATE

She also asked the public not to speculate about the causes of these transfers.

"Transfers are normal and that is how the Government works. If you are a government worker, you should be prepared for deployment anywhere," Atwine said.

She said the transfers are done by a special committee in the ministry that studies how long one has stayed in one office and their expertise before transferring them to a new station.

*Sunday Vision* learnt that most of the officers who had stayed at their work stations for over three years were transferred. However Atwine noted that her work as the Permanent



Dr Diana Atwine

Secretary is only to sign the list of transfers when it is forwarded before it is effected.

She asked any officers who may have concerns about the transfers to appeal to the committee.

In the past, transfers for some officers have been put on hold, especially when they appealed on condition that they were old and about to retire.

Atwine also said this is not the first time employees in the ministry are being transferred in big numbers since she took over the office in 2016.

## TRANSFERS SPARK UPROAR

However, the general transfer of some consultants has sparked uproar as doctors have alleged that the ministry has removed senior consultants in some areas like Hoima and not replaced them, yet they are important prerequisite for any internship site.

"So, there is no balance. Some sites have been left understaffed of consultants, yet intern doctors will be deployed there. So, who will train them?" a medical doctor who preferred anonymity said.

Another doctor wondered: "How can you remove a specialist from Mubende and take them to Mulago? Mulago is in the city. It is congested with specialists and consultants and no one wants to go upcountry. Upcountry has no specialists,

so you deplete even the few that are there by taking them to Mulago and Naguru."

Another doctor who also preferred anonymity said they need automatic promotion with all its benefits for their senior colleagues, such as Dr Martin Ouna, who has just been transferred from Soroti Regional Hospital, where he has been a medical officer special grade since 2010 to Moroto.

"These are the issues we wish the strike should have aimed at and I will keep mentioning even when everyone else gets tired of listening. We need automatic promotion with all its benefits for our senior colleagues," he said.

Some of his colleagues wondered why Ouna for instance would be kept in the same salary scale for over eight years without promotion. That is what people wanted the recent strike to handle, said the anonymous source.

## OBUKU RESPONDS

UMA president Dr Ekwaro Obuku said they had not received any official communication from the ministry, but Public Service Standing orders require that the transfers are accompanied by transfer allowances including transport.

"As UMA, given the timing, we view this as a move to transfer our strong members who expressed the need for quality healthcare for all Ugandans via industrial action," he said.

Obuku noted that the Government as an employer is in order to manage its employees.

"However, transfers are old fashioned ways of handling human capital, especially today where housing and other amenities are virtually absent," he said. He requested their members to stay firm and stay put at their work stations until the matter is better understood and transfer allowances processed.

Partial list of transferred doctors on page 13

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