UNBS urges private health sector to embrace ISO standards

By John Musenze and Simon Okitela

The Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) has called on private health facilities and medical practitioners to adopt internationally recognised quality standards, arguing that certification is critical for global recognition, patient safety and institutional accountability.

The appeal was made recently at UNBS offices in Bweyogerere town, Wakiso district, during the award of International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) Quality Management Systems certification to Jubilee Dental, the first dental clinic in Uganda to receive the certification.

PHOTO BY ALFRED OCHWO



Dr Magara (left) receives an ISO certificate from Ejalu at UNBS' head office in Bweyogerere on Wednesday

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UNBS hopes the number of certified organisations will soon surpass 100, as both public and private entities increasingly recognise the value of structured quality systems.

CONSISTENT QUALITY

Patricia Ejalu, the deputy executive director in charge of standards at UNBS, said structured certification processes enable institutions to scrutinise their own systems and improve service consistency.

"This kind of process allows you to check yourself, to ask yourself the questions you need to ask and to be checked by others." "It confirms that you are actually able to offer a good service and to offer it consistently. In healthcare, we are talking about people's lives," Ejalu said.

She noted that Uganda now has more than 80 entities certified under different standards, including laboratories accredited under ISO/IEC 17025 and food safety management system-certified exporters. Public institutions, such as Mulago National Referral Hospital have also recently attained management systems certification after years of internal reforms.

Ejalu said while sectors, such as oil and gas have driven demand for certification due to mandatory compliance requirements, quality standards should not be viewed as industry-specific obligations solely.

A CASE STUDY: JUBILEE DENTAL

Jubilee Dental underwent a four-year process to align its systems with ISO 9001:2015 requirements.

The standard demands documented clinical procedures, strong infection prevention controls, structured risk management frameworks, continuous improvement mechanisms and ongoing staff training and performance monitoring, according to Dr James Magara, the executive director of Jubilee Dental.

He added that the certification reflects a deliberate decision to embed quality into the clinic's culture rather than treat it as a compliance exercise. Ejalu said that quality assurance experts say such certification reduces operational inefficiencies and ensures that resources are optimally utilised.

Fiona Namusisi Bishanga, the general manager of Quality Assurance and Management Consultancy, whose firm supported Jubilee through the certification process, described the journey as transformational. Since 2023, consultants worked with Jubilee's teams to review documentation, strengthen core processes, train internal auditors and prepare for independent audits.

"Today, UNBS certification is tangible proof that Jubilee Dental's management systems meet international quality standards. This is not an endpoint but a foundation for continuous growth, innovation, and leadership," she said. Bishanga said this certification marks the start, not the end, of continuous service improvement.