

THE SPECIALISTS AND CONSULTANTS FROM CUBA WILL BE PAID SH5M PER MONTH

Govt to recruit Cuban doctors

By Mary Karugaba

The Government is in advanced stages of recruiting specialist and consultant doctors from Cuba, who will be deployed in different regional referral hospitals around the country.

While appearing before the parliamentary committee on health, chaired by Dr Michael Bukonya (MP Bukuya) on Wednesday, the Minister for Public Service, Muruli Mukasa, said a delegation from Uganda had returned from Cuba, where they had gone to negotiate the recruitment of doctors.

Mukasa was accompanied by the state minister for health, Sarah Opendi.

He said the delegation that returned three weeks ago, comprised the Attorney General, the permanent secretary of the public service ministry and officials from the health ministry, Uganda Medical Council and the Health Service Commission.

"The team held talks with the Cuban government and they (Cuba) said they had no problem with it. That is where we are. The team is currently compiling a report, which we shall present to the committee," Mukasa said.

Each doctor, according to the ministers, will be paid \$1,500 (about sh5m), slightly higher than their Ugandan counterparts. According to the new salary enhancement, consultants and specialised doctors' salaries will now be sh4.6m, up from sh3.1m.

"Cuba is one of the countries with the best health services and skilled personnel in the world. There are some skills



Public service minister Muruli Mukasa (left) speaks before the health committee at Parliament on Wednesday as state minister for health Sarah Opendi looks on. Photo by Miriam Namutebi

they have that we do not. We need to learn from them. It is not that we want to replace our doctors," Mukasa said.

Mukasa said the plan to bring in Cuban doctors was mooted at the height of the doctors' industrial action and Cabinet discussed and okayed it.

"At the height of the industrial action, the Government faced a lot of challenges of how to deliver health services. It was agreed that as we handled the pay rise for medical workers, we needed extra help from Cuba. It was better to get that support, rather than leave people to die," he said.

Opendi said there was need

BETWEEN THE LINES

■ The idea of bringing in Cuban doctors was conceived during last year's industrial action by Ugandan doctors.

■ Opendi doubted whether salary increments would keep doctors from seeking greener pastures.

to bring in consultants from Cuba, since most Ugandan consultants do not want to work upcountry, especially in hard-to-reach areas.

Mukasa and his team were

appearing before the committee to explain the Government's move to import Cuban doctors and the fate of medical interns as far as salary enhancement was concerned.

Opendi doubted whether the Ugandan doctors would be retained despite the salary enhancements.

"We have very good doctors, but our biggest challenge is attracting and retaining them. Even with salary enhancements, they do not want to work upcountry. That is why we are bringing in these doctors and taking them to regional hospitals," she said.

But the MPs opposed the

move saying rather than recruit doctors from abroad, the Government should invest in and train their own doctors. They also asked the ministers to explain the cost benefits of recruiting such doctors.

"We have specialised skills here. We do not need the so-called experts from Cuba. Have our consultants failed to do the job? How sustainable is the move?" MP Betty Aol (Gulu Woman) asked.

Opendi said the medical interns would continue receiving their usual allowance of sh940,000 until the ministry comes up with a policy on their operations.