

Mulago renovations delay heart surgeries for 200 children

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KAMPALA. The planned heart surgeries for at least 200 children at the Uganda Heart Institute (UHI) have been delayed because of the ongoing renovation of Mulago National Referral Hospital that left the facility with only four high-dependency beds that are used during major and sensitive surgeries.

The UHI director, Dr John Omagino, said during the inauguration of the nine-member board for the institution on Thursday that they cannot handle more than four corrective heart surgeries for children in a day due to lack of critical care facilities.

"A patient who undergoes a critical investigation must be looked after in an intensive care unit for at least 24 to 48 hours before they stabilise to go to the ward. But, we now have only four beds which serve both the cardiac catheterisation theatre and operating theatre," Dr Omagino said. "Once you have operated on two patients for today, the next day you will not be sure that those two will have left. So it is a very big limiting factor," he added.

Dr Omagino said the surgeries are scheduled for their day-to-day operations but due to the limited facilities, the children must be in queue.

"I have no control of what happens to the children because those are things beyond me," he said.

He appealed to the newly appointed board chairman, Dr James Magara, to ensure he mobilises about \$65million (Shs234b) needed for the construction of a new home for the UHI, currently operating in the basement of Mulago hospital complex where renovations are underway. Dr Magara replaces Dr Robert Sebunya, a paediatrician.

Dr Omagino said in their proposed structure, they have planned for 40 high-dependency beds but added that the Mulago refurbishment will in a short-term add them 12 beds despite the rising numbers of patients with cardiovascular diseases.

In his acceptance speech after taking oath, Dr Magara, who is also the proprietor of Jubilee Dental Clinic, vowed to upgrade the heart institute into a highly dependable centre of excellence with an aim of stopping patients from seeking treatment from abroad.

"We shall not continue to depend



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DR JOHN OMAGINO, UGANDA HEART INSTITUTE DIRECTOR

on India and other places but we shall make the heart institute a centre where others come," Dr Magara said.

He also said the new board members will ensure improved welfare and a good working environment for staff at UHI.

The Health minister, Dr Jane Ruth Aceng, said the institute is currently overwhelmed by high patient numbers given the increase in population over the years.

She said one in four Ugandans has hypertension (high blood pressure) and if not well managed, the patients get heart problems.

"The number flocking to the heart institute are quite big ... they [authorities] had to transfer some aspects of heart care to Upper Mulago due the renovations and this brought a challenge due to the split services," she explained.

However, Dr Aceng said government is aware of the challenges at the institute and is trying to address them.

Other board members appointed by the minister include Dr Jackson Amonde of the Ministry of Health, Prof Charles Ibingira, the principal of the College of Health Sciences at Makerere University, Dr John Omagino, director UHI, Dr Birabwa Male Doreen, the deputy executive director of Mulago hospital, Ms Rose Kiwanuka, the country director of Palliative Care Association of Uganda, Ms Harriet Lwabi of ministry of Justice, Mr Grace Ndyareeba and Mr Peters Musoke.