

Procedure. Though for some officials it takes long to secure clearance for travel, the Director General of Health Services, Prof Anthony Mbonye, says emergency cases can be cleared in two days.

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Ease travel for treatment abroad, Kadaga tells govt

KAMPALA. Speaker of Parliament Rebecca Kadaga has asked government to relax clearance procedures for sick public officials seeking to travel abroad for treatment.

According to Ms Kadaga, the current clearance procedure is "frustrating".

Her concerns come on the heels of the death of former Tourism and Antiquities minister Maria Mutagamba, who succumbed to liver cancer at Case Clinic in Kampala on June 24.

According to Mr Remigio Achia, chairperson of the Parliamentary Pension Scheme (PPS), Ms Mutagamba was preparing to travel to India for treatment.

"Maria, through her daughter, approached us (PPS) two weeks before she died to assist her regarding treatment," Mr Achia, who is also MP for Pian County, said last week.

"Unfortunately, because of the law we have, the problem of getting clearance from Uganda Medical Board has

brought this situation. The law says before you pass money for our bills, you must get clearance from Uganda Medical Board," Mr Achia lamented.

It is a government policy to cater for treatment of its officials abroad whose ailments cannot be managed locally and need specialists out of the country.

Though for some officials it takes long to secure clearance for travel, the Director General of Health Services, Prof Anthony Mbonye, said yesterday that emergency cases can be cleared in two days.

To start the process though, Prof Mbonye said a patient must be examined by a consultant who practises in Uganda.

After examining the patient, the consultant prepares a report about the patient indicating their medical condition and inform the medical board if the case can only be managed abroad.

The board, which comprises differ-

ent medical specialists, peruses the consultant's report and make observations and recommendations.

Then it writes to the director general of Medical Services, who makes his or her own observations and refers the matter to the Minister of Health for consideration.

The final decision on whether a government official should travel abroad for treatment is taken by the Prime Minister, the coordinator of government business.

"When a public official has to travel abroad for treatment, it means the government is going to pay money. The government would want to pay when it is necessary; that means the service for which treatment is being sought is not available in the country," Prof Mbonye said.

According to the Auditor General's Annual Report for financial year ended June 30, 2017, the medical board has referred at least 140 patients for treatment overseas in the

last three financial years since 2014 costing \$2.8m (about Shs10 billion), which excluded flight, upkeep and attendants' expenses.

The common ailments for which

Method

According to a letter for a judicial public official who had to travel abroad for treatment, the minister of Health wrote to the Prime Minister.

In the letter, the minister stated the medical condition of the public official and that the medical board had approved the treatment abroad.

The Health minister sought the Prime Minister's authorisation to buy foreign exchange, in this case, United States Dollars to facilitate the treatment of the official abroad.

The minister also indicated the total sum required and gave a breakdown of the items the money would be spent on.

reference was made for treatment abroad were neurology, cancers, heart conditions, kidney diseases, orthopaedics, ophthalmology and gastro-entomology.

Through the report, the Auditor General, Mr John Muwanga, advised the government to develop capacity for treatment of the identified ailments locally to serve a bigger population and check foreign exchange hemorrhage.

In the 2016/17 budget, Finance minister Matia Kasaija said the National Health Insurance Bill 2016 which provides for mandatory contributions from monthly salary deductions by both employers and employees, is ready and just waiting consideration by Parliament.

For Parliament to consider it, the government must table it before the national assembly. Government has not tabled it.

Besides Ms Mutagamba, other public officials who have had challenges getting clearance to travel abroad for treatment include Mukono Municipality MP Betty Namboozie and the late James Wapakhabulo, who was Uganda's Second Deputy Prime Minister.

Ms Namboozie told Parliament last year that clearance by the medical board does not provide for emergencies.