KIU WAS ADMITTING STUDENTS WITH ONE PRINCIPAL PASS, INSTEAD OF THE REQUIRED TWO

Medical schools faulted on poor quality of doctors

BY JOHN SEMAKULA

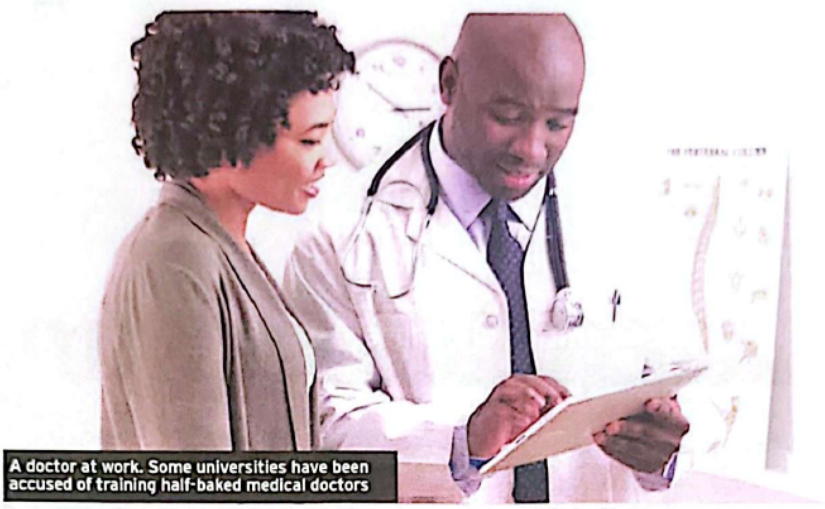
The number one factor when a sick person meets a doctor is confidence that the professional knows what he is doing. That motivates the sick person to surrender their life, secrets, nakedness and fear to the doctor in exchange for deliverance from pain, sickness and injury or disease.

It, therefore, scares to hear that many of the doctors in practice are not well-trained, not competent enough and are learning on the job. Several complaints have been raised by patients, hospitals and doctors themselves about the competence of some doctors from certain institutions.

The registrar of Uganda Medical and Dental Practioners Council ((UMDPC), Dr Katumba Ssentongo, confirmed that they have been receiving complaints about doctor's errors, poor decisions and performance, which raises questions competence, quality and ultimately to the training institutions.

There are seven training schools which churn out doctors onto the market. They are Makerere University, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Busitema University, Gulu University, Kampala International University (KIU), St. Augustine International University and Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU).

The spokesperson of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), Saul Waigolo, confirmed that they had received several complaints against some medical schools and the doctors they bring onto the market.



A doctor at work. Some universities have been accused of training half-baked medical doctors

MEDICAL SCHOOLS

Saturday Vision has learnt that the joint East African Medical and Dental Practitioners Council investigated all the medical schools in East Africa between 2015 and 2017 and found glaring shortages and made recommendations for upgrading.

"In Uganda, the problem is not with any single medical school. All the seven medical schools have inadequacies and have been directed to address them or face closure," Katumba said.

Saturday Vision has learnt that the joint council has so far closed four medical schools in Tanzania which did not meet the required standards.

According to the reports which *Saturday Vision* saw, many of the schools lacked adequate teaching numbers, suitable teaching hospitals, laboratories, space, technology and books.

The dental school at Makerere University was, for example, found to lack space for students and experts and asked to rectify the challenges or risk being closed.

Katumba said the dental school had operated without those facilities for long until the council threatened to close it. "They are now upgrading," Katumba said.

PRACTICING EXAMS

The threat to close the medical schools comes on the backdrop of a proposal by UMDPC to introduce unified examinations for medical students.

The chairperson of UMDPC, Associate Prof. Joel Okullo, announced last week that the exams are aimed at testing the quality of doctors that have been trained from various medical schools.

He said the exams, whose idea is still being sold to stakeholders, will improve the quality of medical practitioners by ensuring that they meet the medical standards.

"Some training institutions are taking in students who do not qualify to be in medical schools, thus compromising the quality of doctors being produced," Okullo said.

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THE KIU QUERY

Before the investigations, some universities, including KIU had been accused of training half-baked medical doctors.

In 2016, Dr Jane Aceng, the health minister, told the health committee of Parliament that she doubted the ability of KIU medical school to produce medical doctors. She said the university was admitting students with one principal pass, yet the requirement for university admissions in Uganda are two principal passes.

The university had also faced challenges when the Kenyan government queried the competence of its medical students, arguing that their qualifications might not be good. However, KIU vice-chancellor Dr Mouhamad Mpezamihigo defended the university, saying that the minister's allegations were intended to malign them.

The joint council report also exonerated the university. The report noted that KIU had the necessary requirements to run a medical school but recommended a few changes.

Katumba said the unified exams will also save universities whose standards have been queried in the past if their students pass the unified exams. "Those rumours that a certain university does not match the standards will stop," he said.

NCHE SPEAKS OUT

Waigolo said they have also tightened the noose against medical schools which lack the required standards. He said NCHE has strengthened its working relations with the professional bodies such as UMDPC; Uganda Nurses and Midwives Council, and Uganda Allied Health Professionals to counter the challenge.

"We work with those bodies before accrediting any institutions applying to teach medical courses; they must confirm that the institution conforms to the required standards," he said.

Waigolo noted that they are also strict on implementing the minimum entry requirement for students. You cannot study history at A'level and apply for medicine at the university," Waigolo noted.

Saturday Vision has learnt that in a bid to ease the flow of medical doctors from one East African country to another, the council has also recommended joint exams for all the medical schools in the region.

DOCTOR COMPETENCE

A doctor is a professional who practices medicine, which is concerned with promoting, maintaining or restoring human health through the study, diagnosis, and treatment of disease, injury, and other physical and mental impairments.

Medical practice requires a detailed knowledge of the human body (anatomy and physiology), underlying diseases and their treatment (the science of medicine) and also a decent competence in its applied practice (the art or craft of medicine).

Patients expect that the doctor will diagnose properly, handle their pain or injury with compassion, explain the problem in simple terms, ensure that they get appropriate treatment while respecting their human rights.

Doctors must also be patient with patients, interpret their symptoms and previous medical records properly, be precise with surgical tools, show comfort while performing professional tasks like diagnosis and surgery.

