

Critics. The interns say they have joined their senior counterparts because of threats from the Health minister and other government officials.

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Intern doctors join strike, want Shs2.5m allowance

KAMPALA. The medical interns have announced they are laying down their tools countrywide to join the striking doctors, whose industrial action has paralysed health services in many public hospitals.

About 1,000 intern doctors have joined the strike.

The president of the current cohort of intern doctors, Dr Robert Lubega, said 52 per cent of their members voted to lay down their tools following the threats of terminating their internship by the Health minister, Dr Jane Aceng, on Thursday last week.

"As intern doctors working across all sites in the country, we have agreed to withdraw our services beginning midnight today (yesterday) because of the continued threats from the Minister of Health and other officials," Dr Lubega said at a press conference held at Mulago hospital.

He said they need Shs2.5m monthly allowance up from the current Shs750,000 they have been getting on a quarterly basis.

"We want government to look into our working conditions. At times, there are no gloves to handle bleeding patients, yet our lives also matter," Dr Lubega said.

Govt maintains allowance

Earlier, Dr Aceng said intern doctors (trainee doctors) are not in formal employment and therefore are paid allowances not salary.

She said the government would maintain their allowances at the same rate without deductions.

The intern doctors were yesterday escorted by Dr Ekwaro Obuku, the president of Uganda Medical Association, human rights lawyer Nicholas Opiyo of chapter Four Uganda, Mr Andrew Karamagi, a lawyer and a human rights activist, and Mr Moses Mulumba, the executive director



Protest. Medical interns and students march in Mbarara Town demanding salary increment recently. PHOTO BY FELIX KANEIYOONA



Health boss. Dr Jane Aceng

of the Centre for Health, Human Rights and Development.

Mr Opiyo said the doctors' industrial action was legal and offered to provide free legal assistance to the medical doctors in

INTERNS' DEMANDS

Current interns' allowance: Shs750,000

Government offer: Shs840,000 and senior house officers offer: Shs840,000

Better working conditions; availability of supplies and medicines

Better accommodation with entertainment facilities such as DSTV

case they are harassed or arrested by security agencies.

Cabinet yesterday resolved to establish a committee to engage striking doctors to bring the strike to an end, according to a statement

issued by the Office of the Prime Minister. "At today's (November 13) meeting, Cabinet was briefed by the Minister of Health about the strike by Doctors," the statement indicated.

The committee comprises the ministers of Health, Finance, Public Service, Education and Sports, Gender, Labour and Social Development and the Attorney General.

In an interview yesterday, State minister for Primary Healthcare Joyce Moriku Kaducu said: "We had already concluded on the issues of intern doctors and the SHOs with the Prime Minister, Dr Ruhakana Rugunda, together with officials from Public Service, the Health Service Commission and ministry of Finance."

Call for dialogue

She said dialogue can solve the impasse. "The issues of doctors are genuine. But the doctors should continue with their work as we negotiate with those who are working with government. I know the main issues are duty facilitation allowances which can be rolled out in a phased manner," she said.

Dr Solomon Kyazze, the chairperson of Senior House Officers (SHOs), said they have agreed to continue offering emergency services up to the end of the semester.

He said about 500 post-graduate students are yet to get their allowances from the Shs4.2b offered by President Museveni.

Meanwhile, Dr Obuku said that UMA had zeroed down on a few immediate demands which include: structured pay for intern doctors and SHOs, increased health budget, supplementary budget for medicines and about Shs100 billion to cater for duty facilitation allowances.

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