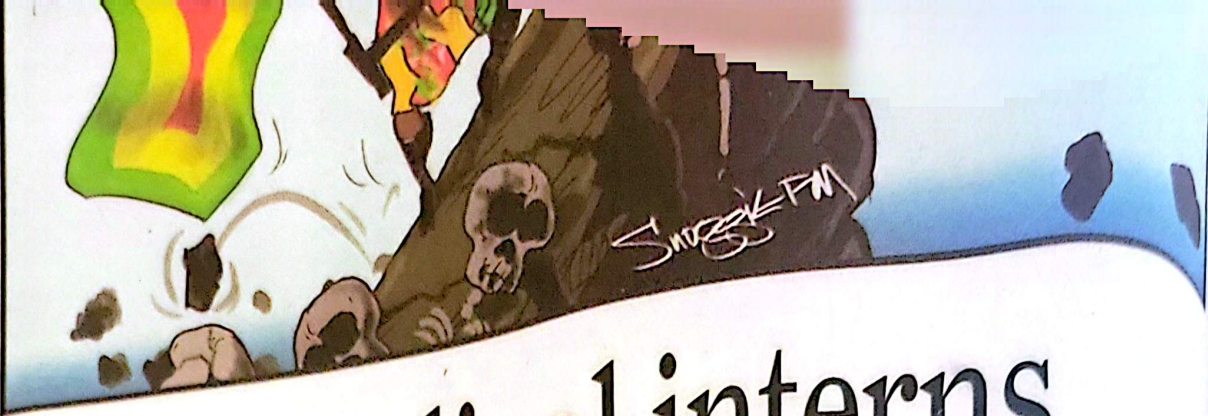




Give medical interns a special new name

"Why are they tossing the internal doctors about as if nobody wants them?" my horrified maid asked. She was on TV as usual and was following a discussion about the medical workers' strike.

"They are intern, not internal," I corrected her.

"Whatever," she said impatiently. "Are they doctors or are they not?"

"Of course they are," I answered. "And they do most of the work in government hospitals. But they work under supervision since they have just graduated."

"So why is the ministry of health denying them?" she asked vehemently.

"The minister just clarified that they still fall under the ministry of education," I explained.

"So do they work in schools or in hospitals?" she quipped and I could not answer that.

"Did you see the young doctors crying for their parents to bring them food?" she continued as I was not answering.

"Then they should let them go and treat only students in schools if they are for ministry of education," she ranted on. "Tossing them about has even spoilt the name of interns. People might think intern means beggar!"

I wanted to tell her that the name of interns was spoilt by one Monica Lewinsky years ago. But then I realised interns, whatever



**Joachim
Buwembo**



the title, have always had a crisis of identity. So, I decided to tell her about Makerere University's junior lecturers.

"Many years ago," I started. "Makerere University had an issue of teaching assistants, who were doing the bulk of the work, but with no clear status. They were variously called tutorial assistants, junior lecturers or whatever name that implied what they were doing. They were

the best students during their first degree course and were retained for staff development purposes as they pursued their masters degrees."

"What do they have to do with interns?" she asked impatiently.

"They were as demoralised as the intern doctors are today," I explained. "A time came when they were finally nicknamed Academic Houseboys."

"What!" she exclaimed and burst out in laughter for the first time.

"You see? Even you have laughed, many years later."

"Academic what?" she was still laughing.

"To them, it was no laughing matter," I said. I wanted to tell her some of the big names in Makerere she sees on TV today, but were called academic houseboys in the early eighties. But I decided against it and went on with the narrative.

"At the time and long after, the president of Uganda was the chancellor of Makerere University," I narrated. "So, a president called Binaisa went

to Makerere as chancellor and listened to the cries of the intern lecturers, then popularly called academic houseboys."

"What about the ladies?" she interrupted.

"I really do not know what they were called, but certainly not housegirls," I said.

"President Binaisa listened and then issued an executive directive. He said henceforth, they were to be called Special Instructors of Makerere University."

"Wow!" is all she could say. "It restored their morale, just like you have said, wow!" I said.

"So the intern doctors should be called special what?" she asked excitedly.

"Health Care Specialists of Mulago Hospital, maybe," I said.

"But they are working in many hospitals, not just Mulago!" she corrected.

"Oh, I meant Special Medical Care providers of the Ministry of Health," I tried again.

"But the ministry of health does not want them," she corrected me again.

"Fine then, Special Health Care Providers of Uganda," I declared.

"Hmnn, that sounds better!" she said.

"It had better," I said as I walked away from the conversation, happy that at least she was laughing again.

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