

... the leading contributors to mental | increasing alcohol abuse.

| always remained the same."

Hospital administrators complain over working conditions

BY BILL OKETCH

LIRA. On a scorching Friday afternoon, dozens of hospital administrators from across the country gathered in an air-conditioned conference room at Lira Regional Referral Hospital.

Despite their polished attire, their faces reflected the strain of managing Uganda's struggling public health institutions. As they spoke during the Annual General Meeting of the Uganda National Association of Hospital Administrators (UNAHA), a picture emerged of overworked officials battling low pay, workplace tension and political pressure.

The administrators, who oversee planning, budgeting, staffing and supply chains in hospitals, described themselves as the often-overlooked engine of the country's healthcare system.

Mr Robert Mpange, the principal hospital administrator (PHA) of Masaka Regional Referral Hospital, said hospital administrators operate in highly sensitive and infectious environments while managing complex human resources, but their remuneration remains low.

"The work we are doing is done in an environment which is very sensitive, infectious and has human resources which are also hard to manage. But when it comes to remuneration, hospital administrators are taken as less," he said.

Mr Mpange said some certificate-level nurses earn more than principal hospital administrators despite the qualifications and experience required for the role.

"To become a principal administrator, you need a first degree, a second degree, additional certificates and more than 10 years of experience. But the wage

THEIR KEY ROLES

- Planning and budgeting
- Human resource management
- Procurement and supply chain oversight
- Coordinating hospital operations

you take home in this economy is really very small," he added.

UNAHA comprises 135 administrators drawn from general hospitals, regional referral hospitals and specialised national hospitals across the country.

The principal hospital administrator of Gulu Regional Referral Hospital, Mr Walter Oryek-Wun, said there is a growing trend of administrators being arrested to satisfy political pressure rather than because of actual wrongdoing.

"This affects us as administrators and officers of government. It humiliates us and makes us feel unappreciated," Mr Oryek-Wun said.

Internal divisions within hospitals also emerged as a concern.

Mr Michael Odur, the principal hospital administrator of Kabale Regional Referral Hospital, warned against the growing culture of cliques among staff aligned to particular directors or senior officials. "We find people dividing themselves into cliques. Some belong to the director, others to the PHA, and that makes work difficult," he said.

The Resident City Commissioner of Lira City, Mr Lawrence Egole, acknowledged the critical role played by hospital administrators.

"Without your planning, budgeting, human resource management and supply chain oversight, there is no healthcare in this country," Mr Egole said.

He urged administrators to foster work environments where health workers feel free to innovate and contribute ideas without fear.

On behalf of hospital directors, Dr Andrew Odur of Lira Regional Referral Hospital acknowledged that communication gaps between administrators and directors have previously hindered progress.

To address this, he said one quarterly meeting each year will now bring together directors, senior principal nursing officers and administrators to jointly discuss shared challenges.

Dr Odur also criticised what he termed "budget games", where some hospitals historically secured larger allocations through aggressive lobbying.

He said future allocations should instead be guided by population size, performance and the ability of hospitals to absorb funds effectively.