

THE DEVELOPED WORLD HAS A SURGEON FOR EVERY 10,000 PEOPLE AS OPPOSED TO 200,000 IN UGANDA

# Govt asked to hire more surgeons

MAKASSONGOLA

By Charles Kakamwa

The Association of Surgeons of Uganda has asked the Government to recruit more health professionals, especially surgeons to fill the existing gaps for effective service delivery.

Speaking at their annual scientific conference at the Source of the Nile Hotel in Jinja on Friday, the association's president, Dr Olivia Kituuka, said several people were suffering from health complications because the existing manpower cannot effectively serve the population.

Prior to the conference at a surgical camp in Busoga, the association members were overwhelmed by the big number of patients with



Dr Olivia Kituuka

varying health cases that needed attention.

"The cases were overwhelming because we have few surgeons in Busoga. We managed to carry out surgery on some and left others, due to limitations of time and manpower," Kituuka explained.

## About the camp

The surgical camp this year commenced on August 21 and lasted four days. Surgeons camped at Jinja, Kamuli, Iganga and Bugiri hospitals, and Kigandalo Health Centre IV in Mayuge district, from where they treated the patients.

The camp was sponsored by Eskom, Umeme, Vision Group, Rotary, City Oil, Wide Spectrum and the health ministry.

The managing director of Eskom, Thozama Gangi, pledged continued support for the association's annual surgical camps, saying it is in line with the company's corporate social responsibility initiative.



Doctors operating on a patient at Bugiri General Hospital, during the Rotary Club Kampala Day-Break Busoga region surgery camp last week. Photo by L. Mulondo

According to Kituuka, Busoga sub-region, comprising 10 districts with a population of about three million people, has only three surgeons; with two of them stationed at the Jinja Regional Referral Hospital and the other at Kamuli Hospital.

"It is our hope that the health ministry will recruit more surgeons," Kituuka said at the conference, which was held under the theme "Non-communicable diseases and surgery".

Whereas the country has an estimated 500 trained surgeons, about 200 are in active practice, handling a population of more than 36 million people.

This number includes specialised surgeons, such as Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) surgeons, Orthopaedics and general surgeons, according to Kituuka.

She said that though in the developed world, there is

a surgeon for every 10,000 people, for underdeveloped countries, such as Uganda, it is worse, with a ratio of one surgeon for every 100,000 or even 200,000 people.

The director of clinical services in the health ministry, Dr Charles Olara, who attended the surgeons conference, said the Government's policy requires every general (district) hospital to have at least three specialists, including a gynaecologist, paediatrician and general surgeon.

Olara further explained that over the years, the Government has been offering scholarships

to people in specialised fields as a means of addressing the inadequate number of specialists and hoped that the problem would be overcome with time.

"The ministry shall continue working with such associations to continue offering assistance to those in need," Olara said.

He added: "However, the number seemed too big because whenever health camps are organised, even those with minor problems that would ideally be handled at health centres or hospitals, turn up".

"Overall, the team received

over 1,000 patients, of which 400 underwent surgery, while those in need of specialised treatment were referred to Mulago Hospital. The most common cases treated included goitre, hernia, hydrocele and body swellings," Kituuka said.

She noted that although some patients could not undergo surgery due to time constraints, they shared skills with the local health teams, who she said would treat the patients.

"People should always seek medical help as soon as possible, to avoid more complications," Kituuka advised.

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