



Doctors analysing X-ray results of a patient at Mulago Hospital. Many medical personnel have fled the country, citing poor remuneration, lack of medical supplies and equipment, lack of promotions and harassment by state actors

Over 600 doctors flee Uganda

By Violet Nabatanzi
and Pascal Kwesiga

A total of 677 doctors have left Uganda, seeking, among others, greener pastures abroad, in the last five years, according to the latest report by the Uganda Medical and Dental Practitioners Council (UMDPC).

The report indicates that over 100 medics left the country annually from 2014 to 2017. According to the report, most of the doctors who left Uganda moved to Botswana, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, UK and Canada.

In the report, the council indicated that it issued certificates of good standing to the doctors when they knocked on its doors seeking recommendations to leave Uganda.

The certificates are issued by UMDPC, a government institution, on request by registered medical and dental practitioners, indicating the practitioner's professional standing. The document provides the latest information regarding the professional conduct of the practitioner as documented by the council.

"The reason for seeking this certification is to enable the holder to migrate to other countries for various reasons. A total of 177 practitioners sought for CGS (certificates) from January to October last year," the report notes.

However, the council indicated that there is "a considerable" number of Ugandan medics in South Sudan and Somalia who are not captured in its database because the two countries do not require foreign doctors to present certificates of good standing before getting hired.

"There is urgent need to devise measures to curb this brain drain by addressing the push factors, notably general working conditions in the country," the report recommends.

Dr. Katumba Ssentongo, the UMDPC's registrar, said the Government should create a working environment that offers doctors incentives to remain in the country.

The president of the Uganda Medical Association (UMA), Dr. Obuku Ekwaro, cited some of the push factors as lack of medical supplies and equipment, poor remuneration, lack of promotions and jobs, as well as harassment by state actors.

Conversely, between January and October last year, a total of 569 foreign medical

Doctors who have left Uganda in five years



practitioners were registered to work in Uganda, according to the report.

Majority of the foreign doctors, however, were brought into the country by non-governmental organisations on short assignments to support health facilities.

Some of them were co-ordinated by government agencies in highly specialised fields - heart surgery and neurosurgery - where there are acute shortages of personnel.

Last year, the medics were involved in several run-ins with the Government in protests against poor remunerations and working environment.

On several occasions, the Government has told the medics that it will not plead with any of them to continue working in its health facilities and that they are free to seek greener pastures outside its health facilities.

The current doctor to patient ratio of Uganda is one doctor for every 15,000 Ugandans. There is one medical specialist

for every 25,000 Ugandans.

The World Health Organisation says 44% of its member states (over 190 states) have less than one physician per 1,000 people. The minimum threshold is 23 doctors, nurses and midwives per 10,000 persons.

Drug abuse

The report also established that six out of the eight cases reported against doctors by patients and fellow medics due to unprofessional conduct last year were linked to drug and alcohol abuse. The other cases were blamed on mental illness among medics.

However, some doctors in question have since been "rehabilitated" while others are still under treatment. The investigation into cases against the medics was conducted by the council's fitness to practice committee. The probe covered cases reported between July 2016 and June 2017.

One of the doctors was suspended from the profession because he refused to respond to calls to report to the council for investigations. Ekwaro said the doctors working under the influence of drugs are unfit to practice, and the council should take action against them.

"It is not common for a doctor to take drugs. The nature of the job is stressful and the working conditions are not good. There should be a programme to support them to relax," Ekwaro said.

According to the report, there is urgent need to devise measures to curb brain drain by addressing factors that push doctors away from the country

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