

Patients flee Mulago Hospital

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BY EMMANUEL AINEBYOONA
eainebyoona@ug.nationmedia.com

KAMPALA. Dozens of in-patients at Kiruddu hospital, a satellite wing of Mulago National Referral Hospital, have vanished from the facility since doctors went on strike on Monday.

Dr Charles Kabugo, the acting hospital director, revealed this while briefing Kampala Lord Mayor Erias Lukwago and city councillors on the health committee.

The team was on a fact-finding mission to establish the service levels in the wake of the industrial action.

"Patients have discharged themselves after they heard that doctors were striking, but for us we are here to attend to them," Dr Kabugo said.

There were no immediate precise figures because the patients checked out without knowledge or authorisation by health workers.

A staff estimated that up to 60 in-patients could have disappeared.

Unlike before the strike when the facility teemed with patients, with 250 on average in admission each day, the place was forlorn yesterday.

Guests found mainly empty beds. Nurses could be seen handling handful patients.

The Out-Patient Department (OPD) and the Diabetes, HIV/Aids, Skin and Hypertension (high blood pressure) clinics were abandoned. Only four patients were at the usually crowded Reception area.

In a brief meeting, Dr Kabugo told Mr Lukwago yesterday that they were handling emergencies and critical cases like patients



Admitted. A medical personnel attends to one of the patients at Kiruddu Hospital that has been abandoned because of the ongoing doctors' strike in the country. PHOTO BY RACHEL MABALA

with burns and those in need of dialysis.

"We think this crisis is going to end very soon, but our Senior House Officers and intern doctors are deployed to these special units to attend to patients," Dr Kabugo said.

The Uganda Medical Association (UMA), an umbrella association of doctors in government employment, called for a countrywide strike last Monday. They are demanding increased salaries, better medical supplies and equipment as well as perks.

The association officials are expected to address a press conference today to take stock of progress made in behind-the-scenes negotiations and update the country on their next course of action.

A meeting in the week with government officials ended in a stalemate.

A plea on Wednesday by Health Minister Jane Aceng for the doctors to resume work as negotiations continue fell on deaf ears. Only departmental heads and a few doctors

handling emergencies were on duty at Kiruddu hospital yesterday, with the majority choosing to stay away.

Dr Kabugo said the health facility, which handles specialised medical conditions, has about 50 consultants, 40 Senior House Officers and about 40 intern doctors, but less than 10 were on duty.

DEMANDS

The Uganda Medical Association (UMA), an umbrella association of doctors in government employment, called for a countrywide strike last Monday. They are demanding increased salaries, better medical supplies and equipment as well as perks.

The Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) team was surprised when informed by the hospital management that a Computed Tomography (CT) scan has been idle for six months due to lack of a

specialised uninterruptible power source (UPS).

The machine is vital for detailed examination of internal organs and helps detect fractures, brain damage, abdominal disorders and investigate causes of unexplained pains.

Dr Kabugo also hinted on a brewing health hazard at the hospital and the neighbourhood where there is no septic tank and sewage overflows onto Salama Road, predisposing residents to infectious diseases.

At the main Mulago Hospital, health workers only attended to emergencies such as accidents and patients in critical care.

Out-patients were told to go away.

The Uganda Cancer Institute and Uganda Heart Institute, which are specialised clinics at Mulago Hospital, were fully operational despite the strike.

While speaking at Kisenyi Health Centre IV, Mr Lukwago asked the government to stop intimidating the striking doctors and instead address their concerns.