

BY SUZAN NANJALA

SOROTI. Soroti City is grappling with challenges in managing hydrocele and lymphoedema cases due to a shortage of trained health workers, raising concerns over access to care for patients suffering from neglected tropical diseases.

Health officials say the staffing gap has limited the city's ability to effectively diagnose, treat, and follow up on patients with conditions that require specialised knowledge and consistent management. Hydrocele is characterised by a build-up of fluid in the scrotum, leading to swelling around the testicle, while lymphoedema involves chronic swelling of the limbs or other parts of the body caused by damage to the lymphatic vessels.

Concerns were raised on Monday during a meeting at the Soroti City Council Chamber. The meeting was attended by officials from the Ministry of Health under the National Neglected Tropical Diseases

programme.

Dr Charles Wamboga, the national coordinator for NTDs at the ministry, said many health workers in the city lack adequate training to manage such cases.

"We recommend that staff be trained and that social medicines and other supplies be provided," Dr Wamboga said, adding that capacity building is critical in tackling neglected diseases.

Late reporting

The Soroti NTD coordinator, Mr Cuthbert Emti, who also serves as the officer-in-charge of Soroti Health Centre III, said stigma and denial among patients further complicate efforts to provide timely treatment.

"Some patients live in denial, making

it hard to get them into care. Stigma and lack of awareness worsen the situation," Mr Emti said.

He further noted that many lymphoedema patients struggle with hygiene, increasing their risk of recurrent infections and worsening their condition.

He said most cases presenting at health facilities are already advanced — in stages five, six and seven — and have become chronic.

"We do not expect many new cases since most people were vaccinated against these diseases, but we are seeing advanced cases," he said.

Mr Emti also disclosed that the city currently has about 18 registered lymphoedema cases, with the youngest pa-

18
NEW RECORDED
CASES

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tient aged 14. One patient reportedly has a chronic wound, while others have neglected their conditions despite receiving self-care training.

He said follow-up efforts have shown improvement in some cases, with wounds healing and becoming manageable through bandaging. However, reporting and tracking cases remain difficult due to limited logistical support, including a lack of communication tools.

Efforts on services

Dr Alfred Anyonga, the acting City Health Officer, said the city has embarked on training health workers to strengthen the management of hydrocele and lymphoedema, particularly in hard-to-reach communities.

"We are building the capacity of our staff to improve patient care and outreach," Dr Anyonga said.

He added that Soroti previously served as a major hub for hydrocele surgeries in the region.

In 2021, the city conducted more than 278 hydrocele operations. However, the number has since declined as other districts have been equipped to offer similar services.

A neglected burden

Lymphoedema remains a largely neglected public health issue in Uganda. Cases are mainly linked to podocniosis, a non-filarial form of elephantiasis common in high-altitude regions, and lymphatic filariasis in endemic areas.

Health experts warn that without sustained training, community awareness and adequate supplies, patients in Soroti risk delayed treatment, worsening complications and preventable disability.