

Ministers root for regular health checkups

By Vivian Agaba

In 1985, Ephraim Kamuntu lost his 90-year-old mother to bone marrow cancer. A few years later, his wife also passed on after suffering from cancer of the uterus.

Prof. Kamuntu, the Minister of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, said no one saw the two tragedies coming because none of them complained of any pain. By the time they found out, it was too late, because the cancers were in their late stages.

Kamuntu said since then, he goes for regular medical checkups to avoid falling victim to any type of cancer, since some are hereditary, or any other non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

He made the revelation after undergoing a medical checkups at the Office of the President on Friday.

The checkups were organised by the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with Mulago Hospital and Life Care Diagnostic Ltd.

They conducted mass screening of non-communicable diseases among cabinet ministers, in order to increase awareness of the diseases. The exercise was organised under the theme: *"Promoting the importance of regular screening, diagnosis and treatment for NCDs to reduce the risk of complications"*.

"I have been screened for different NCDs and doctors have said I am still fit and healthy. I urge fellow Ugandans to do the same," Kamuntu advised.

He appreciated the sophisticated equipment, like the Alere Afinion analyser, which utilises the latest technology and provides a simple, fast and reliable way to monitor



Ecweru gets his blood pressure checked by a nursing officer on Friday. Photo by Nancy Nanyonga

disease progress within 10 minutes. He was, however, concerned that many health facilities in the country did not have similar equipment and the Government should think of providing them.

The state minister for relief and disaster preparedness, Musa Ecweru, said most employed Ugandans tend

to prioritise their work and only visit health facilities when they are not feeling well. He said such behaviour resulted in delayed diagnosis of diseases, like diabetes and high blood pressure.

Ecweru advised all Ugandan men aged 40 and above to continuously go for checkups, adding that there

were diseases associated with old age, such as prostate cancer and for such diseases to be curbed, early screening was important.

Godfrey Kiwanda, the state minister for tourism, said the country needed to put more emphasis on prevention than treatment of diseases, which costs a lot of money.

According to a 2017 report from the office of the Auditor General, at least sh10.08b was spent on the treatment of 140 senior government officials abroad over the last three years. This excluded the cost of air tickets, upkeep and expenditure on carers.

Kiwanda scoffed at leaders and MPs who put their work first and forget about their health, adding that many of them never take their annual leave, but instead spend the leave in their constituencies.

"You will not be the first or last person to hold that position," he said, adding that: "Much as you have to work, you should also value your health."

Dr Gerald Mutungi, the Ministry of Health programme manager for NCDs, said in the recent past, there had been a worrying trend of NCDs, such as diabetes, cancer, heart attacks, strokes and chronic respiratory diseases, among others.

Mutungi said reducing the major risk factors for NCDs, such as tobacco use, physical inactivity, unhealthy diet and harmful use of alcohol was paramount in the prevention of NCDs.