



Students of the Medical School of Makerere University jubilating during a graduation ceremony. Ekwaru wants standards exams introduced for all levels of medical expertise

By Jacky Achan

**C**ountries in the developed world constantly aspire to develop a health care system with medical schools that train doctors to deliver the finest medical care and cost effective medicine.

When you take the example of a country like Germany, medical education is offered through one of the 36 medical faculties of its public universities.

The curriculum defining the number of classes, minimum requirements and guidelines for examinations is designed by federal officials of its legislature and subsequently written into law.

German universities have the freedom to execute these requirements in a fashion and order as they see fit, as long as they follow the legal guidelines.

Therefore each year, almost 10,000 new students begin medical school while 6,000 successfully graduate.

The law in Germany aims at ensuring that all students receive the same level of education and are in position to provide high quality patient care, regardless of where they did their medical training.

#### The case of Uganda

For Uganda, all institutions accredited by the National Council of Higher Education (NCHE) to teach any programme are expected to maintain the highest quality of higher education.

The institutions must follow the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act (UOTIA) 2001 as amended, according to the NCHE executive director, Prof. John

# Standards exams key to high quality medics



Nurses must be accredited by the Uganda Nurses and Midwifery Council before they can practise

Asibo.

This is in addition to following the set checklists and various statutory instruments, or else seek advice and guidance from the NCHE.

In the case of medical education, NCHE works in collaboration with the professional associations and regulatory bodies in the accreditation of professional programmes.

NCHE collaborates with the Uganda Nurses and Midwifery Council together with the Uganda Medical and Dental Practitioners Council in the accreditation of nursing, midwifery, medical

and dental programmes. NCHE does not accredit such programmes without the recommendation and approval of such associations and regulatory bodies.

However, the general checklist such as the law and the quality assurance framework for the licensing process, applies.

The law demands that an accredited institution must have qualified staff to handle the programmes.

The qualification must be relevant to the programme to be taught and meet the standards.

In addition the institution must have classroom space

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for conducting lessons, library with relevant books, science and computer laboratories.

Also in place must be a hospital for training students or a Memorandum of Understanding with a nearby hospital to offer training facilities, on top of the other factors on the checklist

#### Patient to doctor ratio

Today, there are 17 universities teaching medicine in Uganda and 33 tertiary medical institutions.

Dr Obuku Ekwaru, the president of the Uganda Medical Association (UMA), says the numbers are welcome in a bid to increase doctor to patient ratio, which is still far below the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommendation of 1:1,000

by 2020.

As of 2013, the doctor to patient ratio was at an estimate of 1:24,725, with a nurse to patient ratio of 1:11,000 hence the increase in the number of medical schools to help close this gap. However, with so many schools, quality assurance becomes problematic, Ekwaru states.

#### Maintaining high quality

According to Ekwaru, now is the time to introduce standard exams for all levels of medical expertise.

"We can't control the curriculum of independent universities, each university is doing independent controls within the given guidelines," he says.

"But, you can't teach what



Prof John Asibo-Opuda

is not accredited and it is only accredited on satisfaction of the requirements.

All Institutions accredited to teach any programme are expected to ensure and maintain the highest quality of higher education in Uganda," Asibo explains.

Ekwaru says UMA needs to set standard exams for certain levels including pre-entry exams, pre-clinical exams and post-internship exams.

"Hopefully by next year we shall have standard exams to ensure the quality of medical personnel leaving medical schools remains the best," he says.

In the US, for one to practice medicine after school, all physicians must be licensed by the medical licensing board and must have passed all four tests of the United States Medical licensing exams.

The tests examine the physician's ability to apply a broad spectrum of knowledge, concepts and principles to evaluate the physician's basic patient centered skills.

If UMA introduces the standards exams, Uganda will maintain a long tradition of medical excellence that started with Makerere Medical School.