

Doctors' strike: 1 dead, patients unattended to



Unattended to. Patients sit at the outpatient wing at Naguru friendship hospital waiting for health workers. PHOTO BY RACHEL MARDALA

Day two. A boda boda accident victim died shortly after arriving at Masaka hospital after she was unattended to. Outpatient services were closed in most health facilities.

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COUNTRYWIDE. As the doctors' strike enters its second day countrywide, one death has been registered at Masaka Regional Referral Hospital after the patient failed to get assistance upon arrival at the facility as a result of the industrial action.

The accident victim was confirmed dead after being taken to Masaka hospital on Tuesday but failed to get a health worker to attend to her.

The deceased, who is yet to be identified, was involved in a boda boda accident in Masaka Town. The female patient reportedly died 40 minutes after arriving at the facility.

Mr Leonard Muwonge, a driver attached to Inspector General of Government's office, Masaka branch, had rushed the victim to the health facility.

"I drove her to the hospital, but when we reached at the emergency ward, there was nobody to attend to her. I saw a medical officer who was speaking on his phone and when I asked him to help the victim, he ignored me," Mr Muwonge said.

He said after almost 40 minutes, an unidentified man came and checked the victim's pulse and pronounced her dead.

The strike declared by the Uganda Medical Association (UMA) on Monday has also left several other patients unattended to at several hospitals countrywide.

The UMA general secretary, Dr Mukuzi Muhereza, while declaring the strike on Monday said all outpatients (OPD) centres will be

closed, including all routine non-emergency clinics that handle diabetes, HIV and antenatal cases. He, however, said all emergency units and maternity would be operational.

In an interview yesterday, the UMA president, Dr Ekwaro Obuku, said: "We are in talks with the government and have revised our guide to review the strike mechanisms on November 17, when we meet President Museveni."

"We have finished meeting officials from Finance [ministry] and we are now going to meet those in the Office of the Prime Minister," he said, adding there have been failed attempts to arrest him by unknown people.

In an interview with journalists at Parliament yesterday, Prime Minister Ruhakana Rugunda said government was working to ensure doctors go back to work since their strike has caused problems in the

delivery of health services.

At Kiruddu General Referral Hospital, which is part of Mulago National Referral Hospital, no doctors were available to attend to outpatients.

The waiting area for patients, which is normally overcrowded in morning hours, was found abandoned yesterday.

The hospital security guards and one police officer were seen moving around the hospital complex. The

PATIENTS FEEL PINCH

Soroti: Victims who sustained injuries during the drama that ensued on Monday between police and supporters of Opposition activist Kizza Besigye had not got treatment at Soroti Regional Referral Hospital as the doctors' strike entered second day.

Mr Dan Ekocho, one of the injured, by yesterday morning, had not received medical attention as senior medical officers left the work to intern doctors. Another victim only identified as Fred was transferred to a private orthopedic centre. The hospital administrator, Dr Paul Ajuk, said they were handicapped. Asked whether they were on strike, he said: "Just move around and witness what is going on, I cannot comment on that because it's a highly political thing."

Hoima: At Hoima hospital, several patients yesterday spent the day waiting for doctors. "I came here at 10am. I have malaria and back pain. I have not been attended to," Mr George Asiimwe, a resident of Mparo Division, said. The hospital principal administrator, Mr Eleazer Mugisa, said there are a few doctors who are only handling emergencies such as operations,



Victim. A woman who sustained injuries after an accident in Masaka Town on Monday morning is carried on a pick-up truck before she died at Masaka hospital. COURTESY PHOTO

children with complications and mothers that require caesarian operations.

Kabale: Work at Kabale hospital went on normally yesterday. "We do not have any problem here as you can see everything is going on smoothly," the principal nursing officer, Sr Christine Akurut, said. Some of the patients interviewed said they were being attended to and some were not aware of the doctors' strike. We could not, however, verify if the patients were being attended to by doctors or other medical personnel.

Kabarole: At Fort Portal Regional Referral Hospital, work was normal as the clinical officers and medical

interns turned up. However, doctors joined their colleagues in other parts of the country to strike. The acting hospital director, Dr Kaliisa Kabagambe, told *Daily Monitor* that patients will continue receiving services although medical doctors are on strike. "Clinicians and interns are not part of the strike, so patients should not stop coming to the hospital thinking that there are no services," he said, adding: "We are also working on emergencies despite the strike." The district health officer, Dr Richard Mugahi, appealed to the doctors on strike to resume work as government solves their issue.

Nwoya: At Anaka Hospital in Nwoya District, the two doctors

at the facility joined the strike, according to the district spokesperson, Mr Geoffrey Axuma Odokonyero. He, however, said the rest of the health workers were in their respective offices. "When I tried to speak to the striking doctors, they told me they are within the vicinity to handle only emergency cases," Mr Odokonyero said. He, however, advised the doctors to resume their operations as government reviews their salary.

Kitgum: At Kitgum Hospital, the activities were very slow unlike other days, according to Dr Geoffrey Akena, the acting medical superintendent. Dr Akena said ward rounds were not conducted yesterday but the doctors carried out emergency cases where operations were required.

Gulu: Several doctors at Gulu hospital were seen in most of the wards. Ms Joyce Akull, 64, said her grandchild was attended to. The hospital administrator, Mr Jona Oboth, said: "We have not observed any strike here and our doctors are doing their work as expected."

nurses were seen conversing in their staffrooms as there were no patients.

However, the accidents and emergencies unit managed by Dr Micheal Lukoma remained operational as agreed by UMA emergency general assembly.

In an interview with *Daily Monitor*, the Kiruddu hospital spokesperson, Mr Nelson Obote, said the doctors had withdrawn outpatient care services after UMA announced their strike.

"There is no general notice but people know there is a countrywide strike by doctors. However, we are on the ground to guide patients and also attend to medical emergencies as requested by the doctors' association," Mr Obote said, adding that the intern doctors were available to attend to patients in the wards.

Mr Moses Odongo, a senior nursing officer and the officer in-charge of dialysis clinic at Kiruddu hospital, said he had to attend to about 32 dialysis patients, the service being part of the critical care services.

However, some of the routine clinics like that of diabetes, HIV, skin remained closed despite Mr Obote indicating that the pharmacies for the drugs were open to enable patients access their drug refills.

The head of medical records, Mr Stanley Waiswa, said no death had been registered at Kiruddu in the last 24 hours since the strike call was made.

At Kawempe hospital, on level one where expectant mothers, especially those who come for antenatal wait, was almost empty with no nurses and midwives at the registration table as it is always the case.

The hospital is where the Mulago gynaecology and obstetrics department has since shifted.

Available services

However, the delivery suite on level four of the hospital remained operational.

"The doctors and midwives are here. Our patients are being handled well," one of the care takers at the hospital delivery suite said.

While declaring their strike on Monday, the doctors said emergency cases such as those concerning women deliveries and children as well as casualties would be attended to.

Similarly, at Mulago hospital, only the casualty ward, where accident victims are attended to, was seen operational with only a handful of doctors.

Other outpatients clinics, including the eye clinic and tuberculosis centres, were seen with only a few waiting patients.

Mulago hospital spokesperson Enock Kusasira said they have not yet felt the pinch of the strike, claiming that the doctors and interns at the facility are still working normally.

"The outpatient clinics are managed by specialists who are also still managing the patients," Mr Kusasira said.

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