How a Daily Monitor scholarship launched her life-saving career

After losing her grandmother to a stroke as a child, Dr Catherine Namara made a quiet promise. A *Daily Monitor* scholarship helped her keep it. Now at 27, she is the only female resident in Uganda's growing emergency medicine field.

BY BEATRICE NAKIBUUKA



Dr Catherine Namara, Uganda's young emergency medicine doctor, stands ready to save lives, her journey fuelled by a *Daily Monitor* scholarship and a lifelong commitment to helping others. PHOTO/COURTESY

When Dr Catherine Namara traces her path into medicine, she finds not ambition but loss at its root. As a young girl in primary school, she watched her grandmother suffer a stroke. No one could help.

"I felt powerless," she recalls. "I could not help her."

In the silence after her grandmother's passing, Namara made herself a promise: she would become a doctor capable of saving lives when time was running out. Today, at 27, she is steadily fulfilling that vow.

Excellence against the odds

Her journey has been defined by discipline. She began at Green Hill Academy, topping Uganda's Central Region as the best Primary Seven pupil in 2010. That earned her a *Daily Monitor* scholarship to Mt St Mary's College Namagunga for O-Levels. There, she scored eight aggregates in eight subjects at UCE in 2014, placing among the country's top students. Another scholarship from New Vision supported her A-Levels.

Choosing Physics, Chemistry, and Biology, she never wavered. "I knew what I wanted," she says. "And I knew I had to work hard for it." She excelled in UACE in 2016, earning a government scholarship to Makerere University for a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery.

For Namara, scholarships were lifelines. "I did not want to disappoint my parents, mentors, and teachers," she says. "These opportunities brought relief to my family, especially since I am the youngest child and my parents were nearing retirement."

A global perspective

While at Makerere, her excellence led to a sponsored exchange at Magna Graecia University in Italy. There, she experienced a more advanced healthcare system.

"It was very eye-opening," she says. "It reminded me how much our health system still needs to develop and how much more skilled I need to become."

Far from discouraging her, the experience strengthened her determination to improve healthcare at home.

Finding emergency medicine

After her degree, Namara joined Aga Khan University Hospital as an intern. One moment stands out.

"A group of patients had been brought in after a car accident," she recalls. "I witnessed how different teams coordinated quickly to save their lives."

In that high-pressure environment, something clicked. Emergency medicine, still a new field in Uganda, was exactly where she belonged. "I realised that if I gained those skills, I could help save many lives, especially where every second counts."

Breaking barriers

Today, Namara is a first-year Emergency Medicine resident and the only female doctor in her cohort.

"Emergency medicine is still male-dominated," she says. "We need more women, not just in medicine, but in this specialty."

Her presence challenges stereotypes, though the journey has been difficult. "There are times when patients assume I am a nurse and insist on being treated by a doctor," she says. "It can be demoralising."

But she has learnt to rise above it. "I focus on the care the patient needs. Later, when they recover, they often come back to apologise."

The reality of Ugandan emergency care

Namara describes her first experience in the emergency ward as "chaotic and overwhelming," marked by limited infrastructure. Yet she acknowledges progress: "We are growing."

Still, gaps remain. "There are times when you know exactly what needs to be done to save a patient, but the equipment is not available. That is one of the hardest parts of this job."

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Uganda faces a high burden of illness and death from emergency conditions, many preventable with timely care. The government has prioritised emergency care through the National EMS Policy (2021) and Strategic Plan (2020/21–2024/25). Seed Global Health has supported the Master of Medicine in Emergency Medicine programme since 2017.

The power of scholarships

Her postgraduate journey is supported by a Seed Global Health scholarship, covering her tuition and research in emergency medicine at Makerere University. By investing in specialists such as Namara, Seed Global Health helps build local capacity in an essential but underdeveloped field.

"Opportunities such as this make a big difference," she says. "Now I do not have to stress about tuition. I can concentrate on my academic excellence."

Faith, family, and the road ahead

Behind her success is a strong support system, parents, teachers, and mentors who believed in her. Her day begins with prayer. "The emergency department is risky; there are infections, and sometimes death," she explains. "Prayer helps me stay grounded."

As she continues her training, Namara remains focused on her mission: to save lives and inspire others, especially young women. "There is space for women in every field," she says. "We just need to step forward."

From a young girl in Kampala who once felt helpless in the face of loss to a doctor on the frontline of life-saving care, her journey is far from over. It is a story of a promise kept, of doors opened through education, starting with a Daily Monitor scholarship, and of a quiet determination to make a difference, one patient at a time.

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