

Nurses replace doctors upcountry

Overwhelmed. The health workers say they have been overwhelmed by the heavy workload ever since the doctors went on strike.

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COUNTRYWIDE. Nurses at various upcountry government health facilities yesterday worked overdrive to cover the curative care gap left by medical doctors who went on strike on Monday demanding higher pay.

The nurses and midwives under their umbrella body, Uganda Nurses and Midwives Union (UNMU), have declined to join the industrial action.

Mr Justus Kiplangat, their president, said they are awaiting the outcome of the ongoing comprehensive salary review that the government is conducting.

At Mbale Regional Referral Hospital, nurses told this newspaper on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised by the hospital to speak to media, that they have been overwhelmed by the heavy workload ever since the doctors went on strike.

"We have a lot of work. Even the few doctors present are working at their own pace," one nurse said.

Some patients outside the critical bracket being attended to during the strike said they asked to be discharged because it was meaningless and expensive to keep at the hospital without being attended to.

At Jinja hospital, intern doctors joined nursing officers to handle patients, with accident victims getting priority.

While announcing their strike, the doctors said a skeletal staff will be on duty but to handle emergencies and patients in critical situation.

Patients who were admitted at



Turnout. Patients queue at Tororo hospital as they wait to be attended to yesterday. PHOTO BY JOSEPH OMOLLO

Jinja hospital before the strike started told *Daily Monitor* that the nurses were attending to them normally, although new cases were being referred to neighbouring private clinics.

The situation was not different in other public health centres and hospitals in the countryside where doctors who managed to report to their work places were seen in groups having hushed conversations. Others kept moving around the wards without attending to any patient.

Specialists like radiologists locked up consultation rooms, leaving patients stranded.

At Masaka hospital, although clinical officers and enrolled nurses were ready to receive patients at the general outpatients department (OPD), their turn-up was very low.

Dr Nathan Onyachi, the hospital administrator, attributed the low turn-up to the wide spread information about the doctors' strike "and many patients lost confidence thinking that after

GULU HOSPITAL

It was not all gloom, however, as some doctors against the unanimous resolution worked. At Gulu Regional Referral Hospital, doctors could be seen doing ward rounds to review the condition of and treat in-patients.

The hospital administrator, Mr Jona Oboth, said: "There is nothing like industrial action, everything is normal and we hope it will continue in this spirit."

all even if they come to hospital; doctors may not care about them".

Also, cases of district officials threatening to sack health workers who continue with the strike have been reported in some areas like Lyantonde District where Ms Alice Rushore, the chief administrative officer, said any doctors who abscond from duty will be replaced.

In Tororo District, a 65-year-old man knocked by a trailer on Ngogera Road, died on Tuesday night as relatives rushed him to Mbale Regional Referral Hospital, some 45 kilometres away.

Staff at Tororo hospital had allegedly turned them away, citing the strike.

Mr Walter Uryekwum, the hospital administrator, however dismissed the allegations, saying that the victim had over bled and his situation could not be handled at the facility.

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