LETTER OF THE DAY

Parliament does not fix who becomes a doctor in Uganda

I read with consternation Chris Obore's comment, 'Striking doctors should have some respect for MPs' in the *Daily Monitor* of November 18. Mr Obore misses the doctors' point and chooses to overly rely and magnify the unintended overtones of Dr Ekwaro Obuku's speech. One cannot rule out the possibility that Mr Obore is trying to pit the MPs against the doctors' struggle for freedom by magnifying a benign issue in Dr Obuku's speech into something to rile the MPs.

Mr Obore makes a factual error by stating that 'Parliament determines who qualifies to be a doctor' with an outrageously far-fetched reason of the law regulating the practice of doctors made by Parliament. Remember the law regulates those who are already doctors, not who qualifies to be one. Parliament does not determine who becomes a doctor.

Lest I fall in his spinning work trap, let me concentrate on what Uganda Medical Association (UMA) president's actual point is, for the benefit of all. There is a glaring inequity in remuneration of civil servants



in Uganda. This is not because the country is very poor, but it is as a result of a lopsided prioritisation in allocation of resources by the politicians. Dr Obuku uses MPs as an example to illustrate this inequity. A Ugandan MP earning 10 times more than a senior consultant doctor! Many inequity examples abound. He could have chosen to use the inequity at KCCA and other government parastatals in comparison to the regular civil servant.

Mr Obore seems to justify this obnoxious inequity by implying that comparatively, a (Ugandan) MP has more challenges than a Ugandan doctor. This is a fallacy, especially where one Ugandan doctor is responsible for 25,000 patients, working under the harshest of conditions like the chronic lack of medicines and supplies to the extent of carrying out operations using a torch light in addition to miserable remuneration. On the other hand, the Ugandan MP, on top of good remuneration is entitled to endless allowances, expensive cars and was recently agitating for tax exemptions. Logically, who bears the bigger burden of comparative challenges, the doctor or the MP?

He goes ahead to victimise the doctors by evoking the Hippocratic Oath. A quick reminder to Mr Obore that the Hippocratic Oath is not an oath to poverty and servitude, but it actually implicitly enjoins doctors to seek justice for their patients in ways like demanding for equity. The recent doctors' industrial action is not only about their remuneration, but a call for equitable distribution of resources by improving budget allocations to the health sector for infrastructure, medicines/supplies and human capital development.

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