

PAC to probe NMS on drug crisis

Issue. According to PAC chairman Reagan Okumu, NMS has failed to deliver drugs to districts due to the agency's negligence and incompetence which needs to be probed.

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LIRA. The chairman of Parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has alleged that the reported failure by National Medical Stores (NMS) to supply drugs to government health facilities was caused by the agency's incompetence.

Mr Reagan Okumu blamed the current high death rates in the government's hospitals on NMS's alleged negligence and incompetence.

He was discussing the audit report of Apac District at Lira District Council Hall last Thursday. The report highlighted discrepancies between orders and delivery of medicine at Apac Hospital and Aduku Health Centre IV.

However, Mr Okumu said the discrepancies have been prevalent in nearly all districts across the country and blamed NMS for the mess.

"It is a general issue with all these other health facilities and we cannot blame the districts. I must promise that we are going to take it up with NMS and have them thoroughly in-



Speaking out. The chairman Public Accounts Committee of Parliament, Mr Reagan Okumu (3rd left) chairs a session at Lira District Council hall last Thursday. PHOTO BY TOBBIAS JOLLY OWINY.

vestigated," he said.

Mr Okumu, who also is MP for Aswa County, asked NMS to ensure timely delivery of drugs to save lives although he insisted that PAC will immediately investigate the alleged mess at the institution.

"What we hear from our visits is that when you ask for a hundred boxes of coartem drugs, they give you 60 and tell you that the rest are not there. Sometimes they deliver the remaining drugs after four months or not at all," Mr Okumu

said. The committee recommended that government should revise its memorandum of understanding with NMS to avoid its monopoly of supplying drugs.

"Those are operational issues and PAC should present copies of the schedules showing late or halfway delivery. But as far as I know, my ministry has never gotten a complaint....," DR DIANA ATWINE, PS HEALTH MINISTRY

Mr Julius Ochen, a PAC member and MP for Kapelebyong County, said NMS should direct districts to access drugs from particular pharmacies in cases where they are unable to deliver the medicines in the required quantities.

"When you order for anti-malarial drugs, NMS sends you panadol and says malaria drugs are not yet there in a particular period. People will have died yet these drugs are being paid for," Mr Ochen noted.

The committee however called for

cooperation from district local governments to provide the MPs with documents about the discrepancies which would help them during the investigations into NMS alleged negligence.

Several attempts to contact Mr Dan Kimosho, the NMS public relations officer, were futile.

However, a recent statement by NMS indicates that all Health Centre IIs, IIIs and IVs including those of the UPDF, Police and Prisons will not receive medicines, except for HIV/Aids and TB, and vaccines in the 2017/2018 financial year citing a Shs68 billion funding deficit.

Dr Diana Atwine, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health said unless PAC found enough evidence from the complaining districts about the alleged poor delivery of medical logistics, it would be wasting time and money on investigating speculation.

"Those are operational issues and PAC should present copies of the schedules showing late or halfway delivery. But as far as I know, my ministry has never gotten a complaint from any district about late or halfway delivery of medical logistics," Dr Atwine explained.

The audit report also alleged theft of more than 250 boxes of anti-malarial drugs and poor service delivery at Apac Hospital, while no attempt had been made by the district accounting officer to investigate or recover the drugs.

"I therefore order the CAO (chief administrative officer) [of Apac] to have all staff implicated in the theft sanctioned," Mr Okumu added.