

Expensive. About 80 per cent of the accidents in the country are boda boda related. The challenging part is that when someone is fractured, the cost of treatment in specialised health facilities is way to high for many people.

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High bills force patients to seek services of traditional healers

SOROTI. The surge in motor accidents among the boda boda cyclists and their passengers has exposed a big gap in regional referral hospitals as far as the orthopaedic services are concerned. The cry among victims with fractured bones is overwhelming yet services at government hospitals are evidently limited with few able to handle serious orthopaedic surgeries.

News of people involved in accidents in Teso sub-region with urgent need for orthopaedic surgery have always been received with misery by the immediate relatives who have to part with hefty cash to have their relatives operated in privately owned hospitals.

Mr Charles Okello, a resident of Atirir, Soroti District, who was knocked off the road by speeding van on Soroti-Lira Road, would have lost his leg to amputation as the only option the doctors at Soroti Regional Referral Hospital had prescribed.

"As luck had it, my relatives raised the money after selling land to meet the treatment cost; my broken leg was fixed and is slowly healing," he says.

The suffering is compounded by the fact that there is a limited number of orthopaedic surgeons in government hospitals. Where they are available, their services are curtailed by shortage of specialised equipment needed to execute their duties, which is the case with Soroti Regional Referral Hospital.

Over time with the rise in motorbike accidents, locals who find difficulty in paying expensive medical services at the only private orthopaedic hospital in Kumi District, have out of desperation turned to visiting traditional healers.

Mr Joseph Onyait, a traditional bone setter in Toroma Sub-county, Katakwi District told *Daily Monitor* that he receives complex cases of people with broken legs and arms but since his knowledge is restricted to handling simple fractures and dislocations, he is reluctant to handle such complexities.

"I have had cases of people with complicated fractures who fail to raise money for operations at private orthopaedic centre in Kumi approach me. I always advise them to sell land to meet the medical costs since mine is dealing simple fractures," he explains.

Ms Grace Amoding says for two consecutive times, she has had cases of children falling off mango trees but there is virtually little attention offered to the orthopaedic section at government hospitals.

"We tried Soroti Regional Referral Hospital, Atutur in Kumi but we were asked to seek services of a private



Treatment. A victim of boda boda accident receives treating at Kumi Orthopaedic Centre, the only private unit in Eastern Uganda with modern facilities to handle patients with broken bones. PHOTO BY SIMON EMWAMU.



Healing. A patient at Kumi Orthopaedic Centre in Kumi District. PHOTO BY SIMON EMWAMU

orthopaedic surgeon in the region," she explains, adding: "Services at the hands of private orthopaedic surgeons is expensive, one either sells cows or land."

Ms Amoding says people have lost trust in government hospitals as far as orthopaedic services are concerned. They say one has to either pay the money or risk life of relatives at government hospitals.

"The cheapest treatment at the

fully equipped available facility is between Shs700,000 and Shs10m. It can even be above that depending on the kind of fracture," she adds.

She further says such is a burden facing peasants and any other civil servants without health insurance.

Dr Alfred Malinga, a medic at Atutur Hospital says there is a general shortage of orthopaedic surgeons across the board to address the increasing cases of patients with broken limbs as a result of increased road carnage in the country.

"Take a survey around all government hospitals. The state of orthopaedic departments has never been upgraded, the equipment you may find there is that purchased in the 60s," he says.

Malinga adds that the current shortage of orthopaedic surgeons can only be healed overtime if the ministry comes up with a policy which encourages students to specialise in orthopaedic surgery, adding that for now, it's impossible to address the situation overnight.

"With the increased cases of victims as a result of road accidents, something should be done to avert the gap," he explains.

Dr John Ekure, orthopaedic surgeon and proprietor of Kumi Orthopaedic centre, says "It's true there are cases where traditional healers try to steal patients from Mulago hospital.

He says though this culture of turning to traditional healers has been there since ancient days, it is dangerous to rely on.

"The problem with these people

is that they delay patients and complicate the patients condition, making the appropriate treatment worse and complicated," the vice president for orthopaedic surgeons under Alliance Foundation, uniting orthopaedic surgeons worldwide explains.

Mr Ekure says the problem with traditional healers is they cannot tell which kind of treatment certain kind of fracture calls for.

"Its natural bones heal overtime but when handled badly, it becomes a recipe for death," he says.

He says Alliance Foundation has trained nurses in all health centres in the region to handle cases of patients with fractures and offer first aid to patients with broken bones but the shortcoming is that they don't have equipment to use.

"That is the problem across the country," he says.

Dr Ekure says what people presume as expensive in modern orthopaedic surgery is debatable, taking into consideration the cost of equipment and implants involved in treating patients.

"We don't intend to charge what we charge, what you view as cost is relative given that much of material involved in such operations, which basically has to be imported from reputable manufacturers from USA," he adds.

Dr Ekure cautions the public against reckless driving and riding to reduce cases of road accidents.

"If this can be corrected, then we would have reduced our burden as orthopaedic surgeons," he says.

Voices

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