INTERN DOCTORS, NURSES WILL DO PRE-INTERNSHIP EXAMS

GOVT PROPOSES ONE ADMISSION CRITERIA FOR MEDICINE STUDENTS

By Martin Kitubi

In a wide range of reforms in health education, government has introduced pre-internship examinations for medical students and tight admission requirements.

All admissions for medicine in public and private universities will follow one standardised entry requirement, *New Vision* has learnt.

The new reform, government officials said, will become the greatest reform in admission for health programmes across all universities and tertiary institutions that teach medicine and nursing.

The introduction of a standard admission, examination and certification for health training, officials added, will solidify health training across the country.

Previously, universities, such as Makerere would admit highly exceptional students for medicine and other health programmes, while other universities only considered students with just two principal passes in the essential subjects, as guided by the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE).

The requirement of merely two principal passes, government officials said, is hurting the medical field.

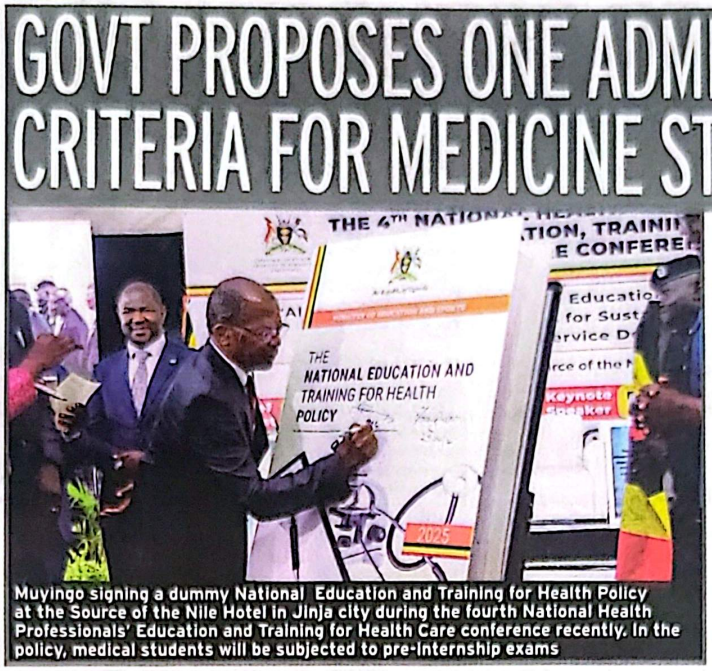
According to the health ministry, some universities would admit students who scored an E in biology and chemistry for medicine.

So, as part of the reform, the Government will harmonise academic entry requirements for all undergraduate programmes, where no student will be admitted for medicine without attaining at least a B in the essential subjects – biology and chemistry.

In addition, students who will enrol for diploma and certificate health programmes will be required to have attained at least a C in essential subjects.

The move to standardise admission for health undergraduate programmes is enshrined in the National Education and Training for Health Policy, which Cabinet approved. The policy was also recently launched by both the education and health ministries on April 29.

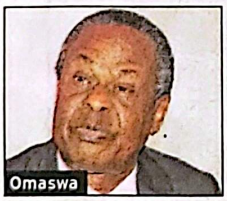
The policy has also allowed government to introduce a uniform standardised assessment for all undergraduate health trainees in both private and government universities and schools.



Muyingo signing a dummy National Education and Training for Health Policy at the Source of the Nile Hotel in Jinja city during the fourth National Health Professionals' Education and Training for Health Care conference recently. In the policy, medical students will be subjected to pre-internship exams


Olaro


Aceng


Omaswa

MINISTERS' HAVE THEIR SAY

Explaining the policy, the state minister for higher education, Dr John Chrysostom Muyingo, said its major aim is to ensure that graduates meet required quality standards before they are rolled out.

He added that the reforms are aimed at improving the responsiveness to emerging health challenges through flexible curricula and continuous review.

"The other key area is that this policy has integrated all the stakeholders in training design. That is both the ministries of education and health working together with health professional bodies to make the sector better," Muyingo said.

On her part, the health minister, Dr Jane Ruth Aceng, said the reforms are part of the wider need to train health professionals.

Aceng noted that the country must improve on the training tools, the number of trainers, time and exposure of both the trainers and students to produce quality graduates.

PRE-INTERNSHIP EXAMS

As part of the reforms, the [illegible] for the establishment of a national internship management framework, which will stipulate standards, guidelines and a national accreditation system for internship training centres for medicine students.

Under the national internship management framework, the Government proposes to introduce pre-internship examinations, where all undergraduate students will be re-examined before they are placed for internship.

The proposal on pre-internship exams is premised on the fact that several universities are admitting under-performing students for core health programmes.

The framework will also standardise selection, deployment and supervision of interns and provide for a specific plan to improve medical intern welfare.

WHAT OTHERS SAY

These minimum standards, Dr Safina Kisu Musene, the commissioner for health education and training, added, will enable the country to have uniform minimum requirements for admission of students for each of the health programmes.

Musene said the sector will work with the NCHE to review the minimum requirements for university programmes and the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Council for the diploma and certificate courses.

"The policy will help the country address issues such as the quality of graduates as well as the number of students that should be trained," she said.

Musene noted that health professionals will now be trained based on actual workforce needs, ensuring that Uganda produces the right number of workers with the right skills.

Musene added that the Government will have a transitional period within which all training institutions will be required to align with the new requirements.

The director general of health services, Dr Charles Olaro, said the country must enforce standards during the training of health workers.

Maintaining high standards during the selection and admission of students, Olaro said, is the other major aim of the new reforms.

OTHER REFORMS

With the new reforms, the country will, for the first time, have one policy that covers the full life cycle of the health sector, including recruitment and admissions, training and assessment, certification, clinical rotation, internship, licensing and continuous professional development – as a single regulated continuum, rather than disconnected stages owned by different regulators.

In addition, the policy has named both the education and health ministries as co-lead agencies in regulating the health sector under the human capital development programme.

The policy also provides for the establishment of a Health Training Management Information System as a new data backbone for planning, regulation and accountability across all health training institutions, equivalent to the Education Management Information System in the education sub-sector.

Relatedly, the policy has given a formal place for traditional and complementary medicine (T&CM) in the training system following the Traditional and Complementary Medicine Act, 2019.

Subsequently, the policy explicitly commits the Government to streamline training, qualifications and certification of T&CM practitioners and to provide a framework for training and mentoring T&CM practitioner trainers – integrating a long-informal sub-sector into the mainstream.

The policy provides for the establishment of standards on trainer-student and preceptor-student ratios, plus a structured motivation package for clinical preceptors and consultants, and deliberate improvement of working conditions in rural and hard-to-reach areas.

It will also serve as a framework for emerging training technologies, including artificial intelligence.

EXPERT VIEW

A section of health specialists has welcomed the reforms, but suggested that a lot needs to be done to improve training of health workers.

Prof. Francis Omaswa, a celebrated researcher, cardiovascular surgeon, and a retired public servant, noted that the policy will help standardise training of health workers in Uganda.

While training of doctors and nurses is a service, Omaswa noted that many health training institutions, including universities, are opening for profit motives as opposed to producing competent health workers.

"There are universities that are admitting more students than their facilities can accommodate. There is a need to regulate the selection and admission of students to ensure that every graduate who comes out is competent," he said.

However, Omaswa asked the Government to empower the regulatory bodies, such as the NCHE and Uganda Medical and Dental Practitioners Council, to ensure that training institutions stick to the standards.

In a separate interview, Prof. Celestino Obua, a physician and professor of pharmacology, blamed the current minimum standards for the flaws in admission of students for health programmes.

"The NCHE standards indicate that for one to be admitted for a degree programme, they must have at least two principal passes in the essential subjects. Until this change, you cannot blame universities admitting students with E in essential subjects," he said.

However, to standardise admission, Obua recommended that the Government adopt pre-entry examinations for all students who want to enrol for health programmes at bachelor's, diploma and certificate levels.

"The commercialisation of education has affected everything. Pre-internship exams are possible, . but they can, instead have pre-entries and final national examinations," he added.

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