

Despite the strike, emergency services are available in hospitals



Government to hire new doctors

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The health minister, Dr Jane Ruth Aceng, has said the planned recruitment of new doctors is going to be fast-tracked because of the emergency.

This was after striking medical doctors refused to waver after President Yoweri Museveni threatened to sack them. Doctors have been on strike over poor pay and working conditions.

President Museveni, while addressing the last age limit consultative rally for MP Margaret Mugisa Muhanga of Burahya County in Kabarole district on Thursday, threatened to sack doctors involved in the now two-week industrial action.

"The doctors who have refused to resume work want our patients to die of curable diseases. As the Government, we are going to fire them and recruit others," the President asserted.

But the Uganda Medical Association (UMA) president, Dr Ekwaro Obuku, responded by advising the President to drop the threats and instead open up channels for dialogue.

The minister told *Saturday Vision* that the President's directive of sacking striking doctors is not hot air.

"It means we go ahead and advertise for new doctors. And within two weeks, we shall have shortlisted and, in another two weeks, call candidates for interviews. On the whole, you could give it about one-and-a-half months," Aceng said.

Recruitment of public servants; doctors in particular, is usually done by both the health service and public service commissions.

However, Obuku warned that sacking doctors would lead to a mass exodus of highly-experienced doctors, which would cripple the health system.

"The President is misinformed, he is getting information from the wrong people. He should get the honest truth from independent bodies such as UMA. We are willing to meet him

**DR EKWARO
OBUKU
THE UGANDA
MEDICAL
ASSOCIATION
PRESIDENT**

The President cannot sack us, but if he makes the mistake and fires us, he should know that doctors are on high demand in Kenya, Rwanda, Botswana and other neighbouring countries.



she said, will be working with the interns, who are already supporting emergency services.

"It is not the first time we have called upon the forces to support us. However, if any doctor feels the need to work, they can come, because we have not chased anyone," Aceng said.

■ PRESIDENT'S DIRECTIVE

Given that the President has the last say in whatever is going on, Aceng did not rule out that the President has always advocated for better payment of scientists, doctors inclusive.

"I believe if the doctors toned down and are less combative, the President would listen to them, but this has to be done within the law," she said.

Currently, a Ugandan doctor attends to an average of 15,000 patients, more than their counterparts in developed countries. There is one medical specialist for every 25,000 Ugandans, yet the recommended ratio is 1:600.

A report conducted by African Centre for Global Health and Social Transformation revealed that over 3,000 doctors leave the country every year.

According to Dr Daniel Tumwine, a paediatrician and executive director of the Uganda Paediatrics Association, Uganda spends between sh52m to sh70m, depending on the source, to train one doctor. This means that for every doctor who migrates, the economy loses around \$560,000 (about sh1.5b). But more importantly, many deaths.

Currently, midwives, nurses and other paramedical officers, who did not join the strike, are manning the health facilities at Mulago, Kawempe and Kiruddu hospitals. Kiruddu Hospital is almost empty. At Kawempe Hospital, it is hard to see someone wearing a white gown.

■ UPDF, PRISONS AND POLICE DOCTORS DEPLOYED

To boost the services in the hospitals amidst the ongoing strike, Aceng said a request was made to the UPDF, Prisons and Police forces to avail doctors, nurses and allied health workers, mainly in Kampala and Wakiso districts, since both are crowded business areas.

The UPDF has deployed 12 doctors, 30 nurses and 20 clinical officers, whereas Police and Prisons have each given four doctors. These,