

Striking doctors to miss scholarships

By Violet Nabatanzi

Whereas Government plans to send 60 specialists for training abroad, those who led the strike will not be considered. Dr Diana Atwine, the Ministry of Health permanent secretary has said.

"I am looking for specialists to send abroad for six months for apprenticeship in cardiology, renal medicines and oncology this September. However, I need to vet and I don't want people who lead strikes or those who used abusive language. I need people who have upheld professionalism," Atwine said.

She made the remarks at a dinner for finalists of Makerere College of Health Sciences School of Medicine at Hotel Africana in Kampala on Friday.

The permanent secretary said the specialists are set to be trained in some of the best hospitals in Europe and will return to serve the country once they complete the training.

The move to train more specialists, according to Atwine, is meant to cater for the country's increasing population.

Striking doctors

Doctors under their umbrella body, the Uganda Medical Association (UMA) went on strike on November 6 last year, demanding better pay, improvement in their working conditions and better facilities.

The doctors wanted the monthly salary of a senior consultant increased from sh3.4m to sh5.5m, a five-bedroom house, a 4,000cc vehicle and three domestic workers.

They also wanted a nurse/midwife, the lowest paid medic to earn sh6.5m per month, up from sh350,000, on top of a three-bedroom house, a 2,500cc vehicle and one domestic worker. The proposed sh17m for senior house officers (doctors pursuing master's degrees) and lecturers.

The Government has since okayed an increment in



Obuku (UMA president)

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medical workers' salaries next financial year. The lowest paid medical worker, enrolled nurse and midwife, will receive sh613,158 up from sh413,158.

A senior consultant will earn sh4.5m, up from sh3.4m. A director of a national referral hospital and director of a regional referral hospital is set to earn sh5.1m, up from sh4m and sh4.8m, up from sh3.6m, respectively.

UMA reacts

Dr Ekwaro Obuku, the president of UMA, applauded Atwine's move, arguing that taking doctors abroad for training was an important investment off the taxpayer's purse, although warning against discrimination.

"There are many opportunities beyond what the Government provides, which have trained numerous super specialists thus far. The discrimination on striking doctors will not

resolve key health sector policy concerns which sparked off the strike," Obuku said.

He said Uganda has over 1,500 specialist doctors registered with UMA and the medical and dental practitioners' council, adding that the country graduates over 150 specialist doctors annually.

Atwine appealed to specialists to take up the current vacant

BETWEEN THE LINES:

Dr Diana Atwine, the health ministry permanent secretary, said specialists in cardiology, renal medicines and oncology, would be trained in Europe for six months starting September.

positions in regional referral hospitals, such as Kabale, Moroto, Mbarara and Mubende that at the moment fall short of enough specialists.

Cuban doctors

Dr Beterana Byarugaba, the executive director of Mulago Hospital, backed the move by the Government to hire Cuban doctors in regional

referral hospitals, saying when physicians are deployed in those facilities, they start taking up the duties, unlike their Cuban counterparts, who were willing to work anywhere.

Prof. Magid Kagimu, the head of gastroenterology at the college, said there was need to improve quality in health services to serve the people better.

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Atwine (left) handing over an award to Dr Joseph Baluku, the best performing postgraduate doctor at

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