



Adeka (right) with other students at the symposium. Photo by Abdulkarim Ssengendo

# Pharmacy students ask govt to increase health budget

MBARARA

By Abdulkarim Ssengendo

Pharmacy students in Uganda have urged the Government to increase the health budget and number of pharmacists being trained in the country every year.

The call was made by Boniface Adeka, the president of Uganda Pharmaceutical Students Association. He said this would increase the number of pharmacists in the country.

The pharmacy students were concerned about the current number of pharmacists, which they said was 25 times below the World Health Organisation (WHO) standards. They said if Uganda was to hit the WHO recommendations, it should have around five pharmacy schools in the country graduating at least 500 pharmacists annually.

"Every 2,000 people are supposed to have one pharmacist, but this is not the case in Uganda, where we have one pharmacist per 50,000 people. This means the Government needs to increase the number of pharmacists trained in this country, so that we can work towards the WHO recommendation," Adeka said.

The students made their call during the second annual Uganda Pharmaceutical Symposium held at Lake View Hotel in Mbarara. The symposium was held under the theme, "Redefining the roles of a holistic pharmacist for optimal health care delivery."

Participants at the symposium were science students from Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Makerere University and Kampala International University.

Calvin Ainebyona, a third year

## BETWEEN THE LINES

Dr Charles Olaro, the director of clinical services in the health ministry, said medicines consume more than 30% of the health budget, after wages and infrastructure.

student at Mbarara University of Science and Technology, urged the Government to hire a good number of pharmacies in public hospitals, such that patients are handled well even at ward level.

"Sometimes you go to pharmacies only to find the pharmacists are not there, yet they are the drugs experts supposed to give advice on the use of medicine," he said.

At the symposium, international students complained about not being paid when they are doing internship.

Dr Charles Olaro, the director of clinical services in the health ministry and chief guest at the event, attributed the challenges to the lack of adequate resources.

On international students, he said the ministry was developing an internship policy, which would define the requirements and benefits of medical interns.

Olaro urged pharmacists to always ensure the availability of medicine and supplies in all hospitals. He said pharmacists were an important human resource in the health sector and part of the team that delivers quality health services to patients' satisfaction.

"Sometimes most of the pharmaceutical work is left to nurses, storekeepers and nursing assistants," he said.

Olaro said the ministry wanted to change the trend and ensure pharmacists were at the forefront of procurement planning.

He said medicines consume more than 30% of the health budget, after wages and infrastructure. He also urged pharmacists to ensure proper usage of drugs.

"Where pharmacists are working well, we have seen an improvement in medicine management and drug use," he said, adding that proper drug use prevents antimicrobial resistance, which Deborah Nanjebe Tungoto, a microbiologist and laboratory manager at MSF-Epicentre, said had become a big concern in the country.

"The rise in antimicrobial resistance, emergence and re-emergence of infections is becoming a global threat. It calls for urgent attention because it is emerging as an important biosecurity threat. We see advanced resistance mechanisms that are more complicated and more costly to treat among organisms we once treated with ease," Nanjebe said.

Earlier, Olaro said treating one patient of antimicrobial resistance costs \$4,000 (about sh14,798,600m).

Nanjebe attributed the rise in antimicrobial resistance to neglect of basic sanitary concepts, such as hand hygiene in hospitals and antibiotic misuse.

She said in 2017, in the US alone, of the 40 million people that received antibiotics for respiratory infections, only 13 million needed them, 27 million received them unnecessarily. She said the burden was high in Africa, though no data is available.