

University officials admiring the e-Library during the launch at Kabale University. Photos by Job Namnaya

of paediatrics: This is a big boost. Information is power and having it at our fingertips will help us as lecturers to improve teaching and patient care.

Nickson Bwambale, student: We have been spending a lot on data to get relevant study materials, but the library will enable us save the money for other needs.

By Hope Mafaranga

Digital library to the rescue of medical students, tutors

Many Ugandan medical students and their tutors had to share books in small and ill-equipped libraries because the books are too expensive to acquire.

As if that was not bad enough, libraries at such institutions, had limited resources to cater for the ever-growing number of students studying the course.

The tutors were also not spared these challenges as they had to compete with students for the few essential books in the teaching of medicine.

E-Library

Dr Roy Jacobstein, a senior medical advisor at IntraHealth International, said the situation is slowly but steadily improving. This is after institutions such as Uganda Institute of Allied Health and Management Sciences of Mulago (UIAHMS) in Kampala and Kabale University got the boost of an electronic library (e-Library).

He said the e-Library is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through Strengthening Human Resources for Health (SHRH) project and is being implemented by IntraHealth International.

Jacobstein said the e-Library would improve the quality of health workers and students since they did not have to share the limited copies of books and could also spend more time studying independently.

"This will transform their small libraries from traditional hard-copy to digital collections and change the reading culture in Uganda," he said.

Jacobstein said e-Library would enable institutions to efficiently use their physical space as well as enable teachers and school managers to devote more time to teaching.

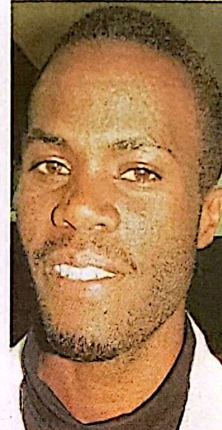
"Medical books are expensive and few institutions can afford to have all the books that are required by the students and their tutors. The e-Library will reduce the shortage of books



Alfred Otim



Nickson Bwambale



Martin Beyendera



Dr Roy Jacobstein

and give more people an opportunity to read different and current books at the same time," he said.

Alfred Otim, the principal of UIAHMS, said previously, students had to bear the extra expense of moving from Mulago to Makerere University in order to have access to the books that are crucial to their academic performance.

He said it was a challenge for Makerere University to sufficiently accommodate students of both institutions due to the high number of students.

"We have seen a significant change in reading since the launch of e-Library and over 3,000 students from Makerere University Medical School, UIAHMS and Kabale University are now using the new digital libraries. The number of study materials students are accessing has tripled," he said.

Prof. Ezra Tumwesigye, the

BETWEEN THE LINES:

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Kabale University deputy vice-chancellor in charge of academic affairs, said the library had a great value attached to it that once well exploited, could help the beneficiaries improve their performance.

The IntraHealth deputy chief of party, Dr Susan Wandera, said they were aiming at building a strong health human resource to combat the rising challenges in the sector.

She said they were working with the Government, public

institutions to develop the country's future health workforce by increasing enrolment and graduation of critical cadres through scholarships.

Wandera said they were also revising national curricula standards, mentoring school administrators in leadership and management as well as upgrading equipment and the learning environment in schools throughout the country.

She, however, said having more staff in the health sector itself was not enough when they are not properly supervised to ensure quality and effective performance.

"We are looking at increasing national health sector staffing, strengthening pre-service and in-service training, address performance and management problems such as low retention as well as skills gaps affecting the health workforce"

The e-Library at Kabale University consists 89,000 books.

Students empowered

Martin Beyendera, a second-year student of anaesthesia, said they had been struggling with academic work, but with the innovation, they were going to improve their performance.

"We have been finding it extremely difficult to do course-works, but that has now been sorted. We are hopeful that some of these books will be crucial during research," he said.

Nickson Bwambale, another student, said e-Library would help them in solving the challenge of spending a lot of money on Internet to search for material to facilitate their learning.

"We have been spending a lot on data to get relevant study materials, but the library will enable us save the money for other needs."

Equipment for technicians

In addition to Kabale University School of Medicine and Mulago, government-owned Soroti Pharmaceutical Training College and St Elizabeth Institute of Health professionals, a private institution in Mukono, have also received equipment for pharmacy technicians.

Dr Samuel Tumwesigye, the Kabale University School of Medicine dean, said the e-Library would make it possible for learners, trainers and other stakeholders to access knowledge that will help them get more skills in handling patients.

"We hope that with this programme, learners will be able to search for books that will improve the quality of our patients' care. We shall have the ability to get printed, visual and audio resources for group or individual use," he said.

Peter Adengo, a third-year dental surgery student, said he used to sift through heaps of books in search of what he needed.

He said in this digital age of smartphones, he can now simply open his gadget and read the book conveniently anywhere around the college.

"The impact is visible because students only carry laptops and on it, you have 100 books, including those on the global scale," Adengo said.

Jovia Tuhaise, a consultant with IntraHealth, said apart from the medical students, the e-Library would also benefit other over 2,670 students at Kabale University.

"The system has the capacity to stock other books to benefit