

EDITORIAL

Govt should curb
blood shortage

The revelation that eight people in Fort Portal, Kabarole District and two children in Moroto District have died as a result of blood shortage is not only disheartening, but also scary. The Kabarole District health officer, Dr Richard Mugahi, attributed the blood shortage at Fort Portal Regional Referral Hospital to closure of schools whose students are major donors. In Moroto, the management of the region's referral hospital said the shortage was just one of the several challenges that the facility faces.

The issue of blood shortage is not new. In 2013, Fort Portal Hospital had to reserve the limited units of blood for emergencies in the Rwenzori sub-region. In January this year, blood shortage in the country forced hospitals, including Mulago National Referral Hospital, to suspend major operations, putting the life of patients at risk.

The hospital spokesperson, Mr Enock Kusasira, told the *Daily Monitor* that some surgeries had to be rescheduled to save blood for emergency cases such as delivery and accidents. At the same time, the Uganda Heart Institute, which was most affected by the shortage, had to suspend two major open-heart surgeries.

Dr John Omangino, the institute's executive director, said it was almost impossible to mobilise six units of blood to carry out one of the peculiar cases, which required blood group O negative. According to an interview with this newspaper in July, Dr Dorothy Kyeyune-Bwabazaire, the director of Uganda Blood Transfusion Services, tacitly said the government was not paying keen attention to this area.

In the interview, she said the Shs197 million budget cut on fuel to her department was likely to cripple their day-to-day blood collection activities across the country. The issue of blood has no two ways. Anaemic children, mothers giving birth, accident victims, cancer patients and heart patients all need blood.

We cannot continue losing lives over a matter that we can easily handle. First, the government should provide the required infrastructure across the country to transport and store blood whose lifespan outside the human body is just 35 days. All health facilities need these blood banks.

Secondly, like Dr Mugahi says, students should be encouraged to massively donate blood to attain the 1,200 units threshold needed daily.

In April, UTBS entered a partnership with two specialised communications agencies to launch a countrywide blood donation campaign aimed at raising 30,800 blood units by end of July. What happened to this drive?

Such and many more initiatives should be embraced to stave off the looming crisis.

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