

**WHO IS TO BE TESTED?**

*The new policy targets students of bachelor of medicine and surgery from all medical schools*

By Violet Nabatanzi

The Uganda Medical and Dental Practitioners' Council (UMDPC) has announced plans to have medical students sit periodic tests in a move aimed at improving the quality of health workers in the country.

The chairman of UMDPC, Dr Joel Okullu, said the initiative will ensure that students graduating from various medical schools meet certain minimum standards.

The new policy targets students of bachelor of medicine and surgery. Besides University, the pioneer university in the country, other universities, including private ones, have recently started offering medical programmes, sparking fears over the quality of graduates that join hospitals for work.

According to Okullu, students will henceforth be required to sit for an exam at every end of the second academic year of their studies to assess how they are performing. They will also sit for pre-internship exams at the end of the fifth academic year.

"We are going to have an examination body that will set the tests. For anybody to be registered by the UMDPC, they have to do the pre-tests," he reaffirmed.

**WHY THE MOVE**

*The move is aimed at ensuring that students graduating from medical schools meet the required standards.*

Speaking during a dissemination workshop of the USAID/Uganda private health support programme in Kampala, Okullu noted that some people join medical schools for other purposes other than saving lives. The workshop was organised by the African Centre for Global Health and Social Transformation (ACHEST) at the Golf Course Hotel in Kampala on Tuesday.

Okullu said not everyone who joins medical school should be a doctor because "being a doctor comes from the heart, not from the head".

# Medical students to sit for periodic pre-tests



ACHEST's executive director, Francis Omaswa and Dr Fred Bisso from Uganda Medical Association during the dissemination workshop on reform of medical laws at Golf Course Hotel on Tuesday. Photo by Nancy Nanyonga



**SCOPE OF TESTS**

*Dr Joel Okullu, the UMDPC chairperson, said the tests will focus on knowledge, skills and attitude.*

When asked what types of tests they would set, he said they will focus on knowledge, attitudes and skills. He added that the new policy will be implemented next year.

"We have seven medical schools, although they have a similar curriculum, we are not sure whether they implement the curriculum," he said.

Okullu warned that medical students who fail the tests will be discontinued and recommended to join other academic programmes.

These are draft amendments of the laws governing the medical councils.

Other amendments are the renewal of licences and registration of health professionals on web-based system developed by ACHEST. According to Okullu, since he came into office in 2012, few doctors have been registered.

"With this platform, it is going to be easier for health practitioners to be licensed. We shall share the information with other regulatory bodies; it is online and the public will be able to see which health practitioner is licensed and who is not," he said.

Dr Patrick Kadama from ACHEST noted that funding for four health professionals regulatory entities has declined in the recent years, leading

**IN CASE OF FAILURE**

*Medical students who fail the tests will be discontinued and advised to study another course.*

to sub-optimal performance. He said this is compounded by other challenges confronting the councils, which include outdated or non-operational council guidelines and absence of a universal platform for registration and licensing.

Robert Kirunda from Kirunda and Wasige Advocates, who is one of the people drafting the reforms, said the guidelines have not changed since 20 years ago, although a lot has taken place.

The new reforms are also rooting for a creation of a compensation fund for doctors, whereby the Government should take on the obligation to recognise and compensate health practitioners who suffer from the consequences of being in risky situation, for example, during an outbreak of Ebola and those who contract infections.

**WHAT OTHERS SAY**

Dr Charles Kasozi, a lecturer at Makerere University Medical School, supported the periodical tests and asked UMDPC to also control the code of training in medical schools by ensuring that lecturers are qualified.

"Most parents have money, they take their children, who have failed Senior Six to do medicine in other countries such as India and China. Those are the same doctors who come and lecture in some of our universities, yet they are unqualified; their training does not match with our training at Makerere," he said.

Kasozi also said UMDPC should gazette internship training centres and ensure that they have well qualified supervisors in medicine, paediatrics, surgery obstetric and gynaecologists and preventive medicine.