

Vision investigates oxygen shortages

BY GLORIA NAKAJUBI

Lack of oxygen therapy is increasingly becoming one of the major contributors of death at health facilities in the country.

What ordinarily exists freely in air can be quite critical for survival under certain conditions.

According to a physician, Joel Kimera, conditions such as severe pneumonia, asthmatic attacks, respiratory distress, birth asphyxia, head injury, paraffin inhalation and metabolic acidosis, among others, may disable the body from processing the naturally available oxygen.

"These emergency cases require oxygen therapy and every minute lost might turn out to be fatal," Kimera said. "Without oxygen, all the other body organs can be damaged in a matter of seconds."

However, ironically, oxygen is one of the scarcest commodities. Currently, one has to part with about sh4.5m for oxygen in a private health facility per month. Oxygen per day costs about sh150,000 on average.

In spite of the huge Government investment to build plants at all the regional referral hospitals, there are continued cases of a lack of oxygen and many resulting deaths.

Mulago National Referral Hospital, for instance, has two plants, but physicians at the facility and its other subsidiaries still complain about the unreliable supply of oxygen.

Oxygen is listed on the Essential Medicines and Health Supplies List for Uganda (2016) and should, ideally, be available at all health facilities, most especially from health centre IV and above. Unfortunately, that is not always the case.

Sunday Vision has carried out an investigation on why the would-be free commodity is increasingly contributing to the death of many Ugandans. The joint investigations report will be published in tomorrow.

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