

Medical Council to probe deaths at Mengo camp

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KAMPALA. The Uganda Medical and Dental Practitioners Council is asking all those claiming to have lost relatives under unclear circumstances during the one-week October medical camp by Mengo Hospital to lodge formal complaints to enable investigations.

The umbrella organisation that regulates the practice of medicine and dentistry in the country was responding to the recent media reports that at least 13 of 28 patients operated during the neurosurgical camp, including former Kyadondo South MP Issa Kikungwe, have since passed on.

Neurosurgery is a surgical operation that involves any part of the nervous system including the brain, spinal cord, peripheral nerve and the cerebrovascular system usually referred to as brain surgery.

Dr Katumba Sentongo, the Medical Council's registrar, said they had verified papers of the two foreign neurosurgeons and other medical doctors who undertook the surgeries during the camp while the rest of the team members, including nurses, were cleared by the respective regulatory bodies in the country.

"We cannot rely on infor-

mal reports to investigate the deaths unless any of them [the said victims' relatives] lodges a formal complaint to the Medical Council. Otherwise, anyone can lodge a complaint," Dr Katumba told *Daily Monitor* in an interview yesterday.

Meant to benefit low income earners who could not afford the costly procedure that requires between Shs5m and Shs15m under private arrangements in the country, the camp, was organised by Mengo Hospital in collaboration with the US-based Duke University and the Neurosurgical Society of Uganda (NSU).

MINISTRY RESPONSE

Responsibility. Dr Diana Atwine, the Health ministry permanent secretary, said the responsibility to investigate the case rests directly with the Medical Council, which is expected to submit a report to the ministry after investigations.

The team of eight neurosurgeons with four of them said to be Ugandans, was led by Prof Michael Haglavend of Duke Global Health Institute.

Some sources have alleged that the hospital could have used foreign quack doctors and interns to manage the complex procedures. But Mengo Hospital administration has since refuted the allegations, saying the team has been operating similar medical camps in Uganda for the last 10 years at

Mulago National Referral Hospital and Mbarara Regional Referral Hospital.

They described the allegations as "mudslinging" the 120-year-old Anglican Church-founded hospital.

"In the Neurosurgical camp, 33 clients with very complex neurosurgical conditions were operated on by the USA team and our local neurosurgeons. Unfortunately, we lost five of these clients. 28 of the 33 operated clients are recovering," Dr Rose Mutumba, the Mengo Hospital medical director, said in press statement issued yesterday.

But the hospital administration was hesitant to provide proof of the neurosurgical camp report indicating that only five of the 33 patients had died following the operation.

Mr Alon Kabale, a close family member of Kikungwe, confirmed that some of the family members were not convinced with the circumstances under which their relative died.

"We are still gathering information to see if doctors were not qualified...different people [family members] are coming up with options to sue and we think the position will come up after the Dua [prayers] on December 17," Mr Kabale said yesterday by telephone.

On her part, Dr Diana Atwine, the Health ministry permanent secretary, said the responsibility to investigate the case rests directly with the Medical Council, which is expected to submit a report to the ministry after investigations.