



Protest. Medical interns carry placards during demonstration in 2018. The interns across the country have vowed not to return to work until government clears their arrears for the last two months.
PHOTO BY ALEX EMMANUEL

Medical interns strike again over allowances

Aggrieved. They say most of their colleagues can barely survive since they depend on the allowances.

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KAMPALA. Medical interns across the country have vowed not to return to work until government clears their arrears for the last two months.

The strike, which started at midnight on Friday, is likely to slow down clinical services at their training hospitals.

The interns, including doctors, nurses, pharmacists and dentists at different government hospitals, offer services in the understaffed health facilities as part of their training.

Dr Robert Lubega, the interns' president of the 2017/2018 cohort, said their colleagues at Soroti Regional Referral Hospital are worse off as they have not received any allowances since December last year

despite several engagements with the concerned parties.

"As medical interns 2017-2018, we have laid down our tools as we await government response towards our plight. Through the engagement of our leadership umbrella, the national interns' executive, we will be glad to continue engagement with the various stakeholders for improved welfare," Dr Lubega said at a press conference in Kampala yesterday.

Hard times

Dr Lubega also said many of their colleagues have been evicted from their rental houses since more than half of all interns are not accommodated at the hospitals, not fed, but depend entirely on allowance, making it hard for them to meet their daily expenses.

"Only six of the 35 sites have received payment for March and this has been done by using different portions of these hospitals' bud-



“ We communicated to them [interns] that there was a delay in the release of funds but as soon as it comes, and it has now come, they have to be paid.” RUTH ACENG, HEALTH MINISTER

gets,” he added. Dr Lubega named the stations as Mbarara, Jinja and Masaka regional referral hospitals as well as Entebbe and Kagando

general hospitals. The interns have on several occasions laid down their tools over delayed allowances, which the Health ministry blames on inadequate allocation.

The ministry says although they receive money from Finance ministry to pay the interns on a quarterly basis, this is always utilised in one month.

The Finance ministry attributes the problem to the rising number of medical interns every year yet it has not increased its allocation to the interns over time.

Last November, the Health ministry committed to paying the interns on a monthly basis as opposed to quarterly; one of the preconditions that led to suspension of the recent three-week strike by doctors.

Although the intern doctors say nursing interns have also joined the strike, a visit to Mulago hospital by *Daily Monitor* found the student nurses on duty in some wards, including the casualty.

Mr Enock Kusasira, the Mulago hospital spokesperson, said the impact of the interns strike was too early to assess, but added that the health facility was working hard to have interns paid so that they resume work.

When contacted, Health minister Ruth Aceng expressed regret that the interns had repeatedly used strikes as a bargaining chip.