



Sixty years later, Nakamya gets her degree

An anaesthesiologist administers medication and oxygen to a patient.

Catherine Nakamya Magoola, 60, was among the 9,295 students who graduated at Makerere University recently. The skills gap among anaesthetic officers she supervised for decades motivated her to go back to school. Her goal is to gain competence, train more anaesthesiologists and effectively attend to patients.

BY SYLVIA KATUSHABE

Catherine Nakamya Magoola, 60, was among the 9,295 students who graduated during Makerere University's 76th graduation ceremony, held at Freedom Square from February 24 to 27.

She was awarded a Bachelor of Science in Medical Education, six months, after she had retired as a senior anaesthetic officer, at Mulago, Uganda's largest National Referral Hospital, a position she held since 2003.

She retired on August 25, 2025, but this did not deter her from becoming a professional who would contribute to the training competent anaesthetic officers in the country.

Nakamya says the skills gap among some student anaesthetic officers that she supervised for decades motivated her to go back to school, in order to gain competence of training them in a professional manner and be able to effectively attend to patients and save lives.

"They practice on patients under the guidance of a senior personnel. As I worked with some of them in the theatre, I identified some gaps and encouraged them to read about certain topics to be able to support patients fully. But some would say: why are you telling us to read when you are not a tutor?" Ms Nakamya recalls the challenging moments with some interns.

She adds: "I always longed to work after I had trained. That is why I had to enrol for a degree course in September 2022. What I desired was to fulfil the gap of guiding people to do what is right."

Anaesthetic officers are responsible for preparing, monitoring and administering anaesthesia to control pain and consciousness during surgery and ensuring patient safety, among other responsibilities. Poor anaesthesia can lead to death or disability according to health experts.

A master's degree in sight

Nakamya's thirst for learning and acquiring more academic qualifications is far from being quenched. She also plans to enroll for Masters. Not even her age can stand in her way. She believes that a willing heart will always accomplish what it desires.

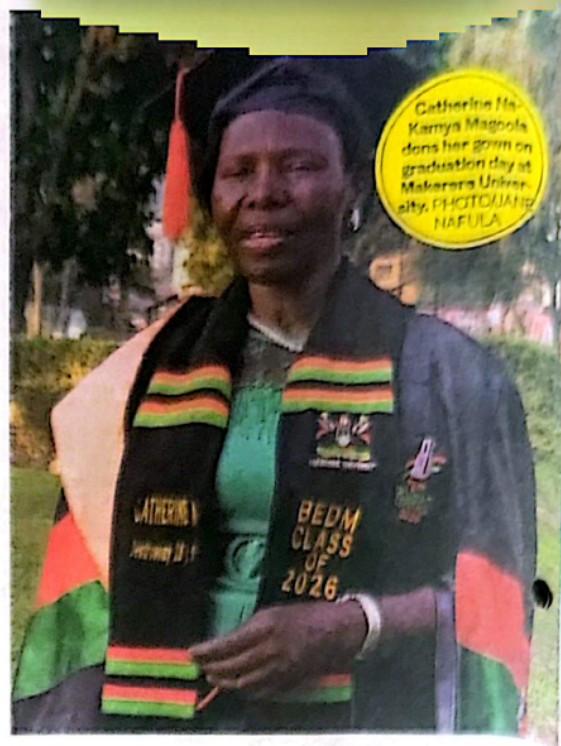
"For as long as God gives me life and fees, I will have to upgrade. I thank God for what I have already achieved," she says.

Several health facilities in Uganda struggle to offer anaesthesia due to acute shortage of anaesthetic officers.

According to the Ministry of Health, Uganda needs 400, anaesthesiologists, more than 2,000 anaesthetic officers and 500 Intensive Care Unit (ICU) nurses to work in regional referral hospitals. The sector is, however, currently experiencing a shortage of 187,000 professionals.

400

Current need. The number of anaesthesiologists Uganda needs 400, and more than 2,000 anaesthetic officers and 500 Intensive Care Unit (ICU) nurses to work in regional referral hospitals, according to the Ministry of Health. The sector is, however, currently experiencing a shortage of 187,000 professionals.



sionals.

This is attributed to inadequate training, lack of wage to facilitate recruitment and limited number of trained personnel.

Nakamya says continuous professional development is critical to addressing skills gap among health professionals and that professionals, including medical education instructors should embrace it to improve service delivery.

"The country needs to train medical personnel to manage the ever increasing disease burden," she says.

Dr Mark Kasumba, head of the anaesthesia unit at Mulago National Referral Hospital, describes Nakamya as a role model in the health sector, who is committed and dedicated to adding value to herself and those around her.

"Among all her achievements in life, one thing she is pushing for is to ensure that people get educated. She is passionate about educating and passing on skills. She has realised the value of having a skill when it comes to saving a life," Dr Kasumba says.

Figures and commitment

He says not even retirement could deter Nakamya from saving lives and upgrading in academics.

"Even as she was getting closer to retirement, the issue of education remained central to her goals, he says.

He explains that as a woman, Nakamya has understood the power she has in the community around her.

According to Dr Kasumba, the number of women in anaesthesia almost greater than that of their male counterparts and that former are more preferred, noting that anaesthesia requires commitment.

Rogers Mukalele, an IT specialist at Uganda Professional Science Teachers' Union (UPSTU) and a niece to Nakamya, also described her as a renowned educationist in her community.

"She educated many of us. We are what we are today because of her efforts and she is still paying school fees for a number of needy children,"

Mukalele says.

Nakamya's career journey

Nakamya first trained as an enrolled nurse at Villa-Maria School of Nursing and Midwifery in Masaka City between 1986 and 1988.

In 1990, she enrolled for a Diploma in Nursing at Rubaga School of Nursing and Midwifery and graduated in 1991.

She secured employment at Mulago Hospital, where she served as a registered nurse for two years.

In 1994, Nakamya moved to Mulago National Referral Hospital, where she worked under the Private Services Committee.

She explains that medics who were recruited by the Private Services Committee, worked at the private wing of the hospital.

When the Ministry of Public Services advertised slots for registered nurses, Nakamya expressed interest.

Committed to the health sector

In 1997, she applied at the Uganda Institute of Allied Health and Management Sciences, formerly Mulago Post-graduate School to work as a nurse. While there, she applied to study a Diploma in anaesthesia and completed in 1999.

She immediately registered with Allied Health Professionals' Council and was employed as a nursing officer in the department of anaesthesia at Mulago National Referral Hospital, a position she held for eight years.

In 2003, she was promoted to senior anaesthetic officer, a position she held up to the time of her retirement in August, last year.

In September, 2022, Nakamya enrolled for a Bachelor of Science in Medical Education and graduated on February 24, 2026.

She is currently in the process of registering with the professional bodies, before commencing the journey of training students. She believes she has potential to contribute to better service delivery of the health sector.

Key role. Anaesthetic officers prepare, monitor and administer anaesthesia to control pain and consciousness during surgery and ensuring patient safety.