

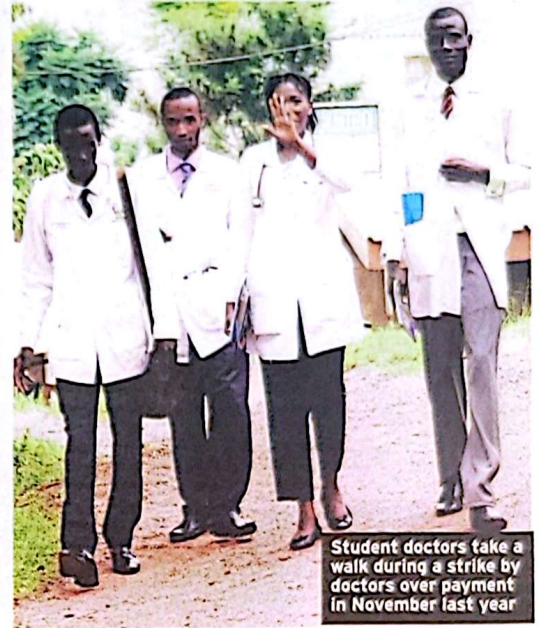
# HEALTH & Beauty

New Vision YOUR WELLNESS GUIDE

Monday, January 8, 2018



Surgeons performing a surgery at Mulago Hospital. Some doctors have decided to take their skills to other countries where the pay is better



Student doctors take a walk during a strike by doctors over payment in November last year

## How health sector fared in 2017



There were stockouts of antiretrovirals

As Uganda works towards achieving middle-income status, it is important to note that good health for the people is an important factor. In 2017, a lot happened in Uganda's health sector, but how can we avoid the mistakes in 2018, writes Lilian N Magezi

**Human resource**  
Medical doctors and interns under the Uganda Medical Association went on strike in November, demanding a salary increment and improved working conditions. The staffing levels have

also remained low in health facilities and a significant number of posts are vacant. According to information from the African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF) - Uganda the four common reasons for

inadequate staffing are:

- Insufficient supply and training of healthworkers
- Inadequate distribution, whereby health workers do not want to go to rural areas
- Inefficient utilisation
- Migration

In addition to leaving the country in search of greener pastures, Uganda's health workers have been known to migrate from rural to urban; from poorer to less poor areas; from public to the private sector and from public to programmes funded by donor organisations.

Conversely, in order to build skills, in September last year, the Government sent 43 doctors to India and Canada for specialised training in various fields. When it comes to human

resources for health, Prof. Francis Omaswa notes that there is a need to maintain an adequate, accessible, available and competent workforce by retaining health workers.

Addressing doctors at the cardiovascular conference in March last year, Omaswa urged medical workers to be willing to go where their services are needed.

AMREF appeals to the Government to develop policies and legislative framework to facilitate effective implementation of the health workforce migration so that they can monitor the number of medical workers leaving the country and those coming in.

### Drug stockouts

Every year, the health sector experiences challenges of

stockout of drugs, vaccines and other supplies.

In 2017, it was not any different. The health sector was hit by a stockout of drugs and vaccines, most notably of antiretrovirals (ARVs).

Speaking to journalists on World AIDS Day recently, Alice Kayongo, a public health specialist working with Uganda Cares, noted that Uganda had experienced major stockouts of HIV drugs and other essential medicines.

In September, a report from the US government's global AIDS programme, PEPFAR, stated that Uganda did not purchase ARVs for the fourth quarter of the year 2016/2017. It was also noted that the Government used the money to pay a previously incurred debt.

Dr Nelson Musoba, the acting director general of the Uganda AIDS Commission explained that the shortage was brought about by the National Medical Stores (NMS) failure to procure medicine on time.

Kayongo urged the Government not to divert money meant for drugs and medical supplies to other issues, while Musoba urged the ministry and NMS to plan better so that medicines are procured on time.

### Infrastructure

Throughout last year, several activists, politicians and MPs from across the political divide regularly decried the poor state of health facilities in the country.

For instance, in February,

# 2018 could be better year for health

the debate about the poor state of our health facilities was ignited by the submission of the Mityana Municipality MP, Francis Zaake, who narrated a terrifying account of Angel Nansubuga, a woman who bled to death at Mityana Hospital after giving birth, because she did not have sh5,000 the nurse had for asked to give medicines that would stop the bleeding.

## Health Insurance

Parliament had pledged to pass the 2007 National Health Insurance Bill into law in the new financial year. However, this did not happen. Failure to pass the Bill means Ugandans cannot achieve universal health coverage.

The health sector would also miss out on the money that would have been paid by citizens under the insurance scheme.

The Bill proposes that a person contributes 4% of their salary to the scheme and in addition, the employer also contributes a percentage for the individual.

Such money would go a long way in financing the health sector and avoiding shortages. For long, the issue of inadequate funding has been a big one in the health sector. For instance, in January, officials from Mulago Hospital asked the Government to allow them charge patients a minimum medical fee to top up the pay of their health workers.

The executive director of Mulago Hospital, Dr Bateria Byarugaba, explained that this would ensure better service delivery.

In April, the health ministry was seeking sh50b for the recruitment of community health extension workers and educate communities on diseases and link them to health services.

The sh50b was under the unfunded priorities of the ministry in the health budget for the financial year 2017/2018.

## sh890b

The cost of construction of super-specialised hospital



Mulago Hospital's new women's ward under construction

## DEVELOPMENTS

It is worth noting that there were several rehabilitation projects that involved hospitals such as Moroto and Mubende.

A new maternal and neonatal centre was opened at Mulago Hospital and staff houses were constructed at Moroto Hospital.

In June, President Yoweri Museveni launched the construction of a sh890b super-specialised hospital, in Lubowa, Wakiso district, a project he described as 'a dream-come-true'.

Mulago Cancer Institute also recently procured a radiotherapy cancer machine. The long-awaited radiotherapy cancer machine arrived in October last year.

The assembling of the machine was expected to bring much relief to patients who have been braving tedious and expensive journeys to foreign countries for treatment.

National Medical Stores (NMS) is now constructing a 30,000 pallet capacity warehouse, which is expected to be



The new cancer machine

completed this year.

According to the health minister Jane Ruth Aceng, the high storage warehouse will enable the storage of big amounts of drugs, which will solve the problem of drug stockouts. However, health

activists urged NMS to complete an emergency inter-warehouse transfer with other supply chains, such as the Joint Medical Stores and Medical Access Uganda Limited so as to mitigate the issue of drug shortages.



## What needs to be done

By Lillian N Magezi

**B**ehavioural change communication needs to be given priority to prevent diseases and encourage people to seek health services in time. As Dr. Specioza Kazibwe, the presidential adviser on population health, says there is need to sensitise people about the need to prevent diseases and ensure good welfare, instead of waiting to fall ill and seeking to have the diseases cured.

There is also need to increase funding to the health sector so as to develop infrastructure, reduce donor reliance, increase staffing and motivate health workers. Increasing the budget will reduce drug stockouts and increase the quality of services.

## Insurance

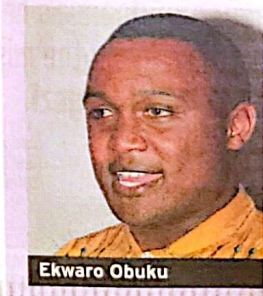
The Government should also fast-track the implementation of the universal health insurance scheme to increase funding to the health sector and increase universal health coverage. As shown by Mulago's appeal for charging patients a fee, it is clear that it is not sustainable for the Government to provide free medical services.

## Drug purchase

To avoid drug stockouts, National Medical Stores is advised to procure the drugs on time. When funding is ring-fenced for procurement of drugs, it should be used only for that purpose.

Public health specialist Alice Kayongo says the Government should double the budget for HIV treatment and monitor both the health ministry and National Medical Stores activities.

Dr Ekwaro Obuku, the Uganda Medical Association president, urged the Government to enhance doctors' salaries and expand investment in antiretrovirals and other essential drugs.



Ekwaro Obuku

## sh30b

Amount under the unfunded priorities of the ministry



Construction taking place at one of Mulago's wards



Doctors attending to mothers at Kawempe Hospital