

Uganda grappling with shortage of radiologists

Implication. A ministry document shows that Uganda has only 37 radiologists.

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KAMPALA. The country is facing a critical shortage of radiologists, which health experts say has caused several deaths in hospitals due to misinterpretation of conditions.

A Ministry of Health document seen by this newspaper indicates that there are only 37 radiologists, whose work entails using imaging techniques such as remote scanning, radiotherapy, X-ray, ultrasound, MRIs and CT scan to diagnose and treat certain conditions from broken bones to serious heart conditions.

State minister for Health Sarah Opendi said the shortage of radiologists clogs service delivery and a number of people could die, especially in rural areas.

Dr Annet Kugonza, a board member of the Association of Radiologists of Uganda, said

the number is just a drop in the ocean given the departments in the health sector and the demands therein.

"This is a very small number, a big hospital like Mulago requires about 20 radiologists given the number of cases reported there every day. The departments are so many, you need to have at least a radiologist in each," said Dr Kugonza.

The head of the Department of Radiology at MUST, Dr Moses Acan, said many people die due to misinterpretation of images. "You get to treat someone based on what they tell us, you treat

them for an infection, then it is only at a later stage that you will realise that they are cancerous. I came to realise this when I became a radiologist," Dr Acan said.

Qualifications

For one to become a radiologist, they need to have done a degree in medicine, which is normally five years of school, one year of internship and two years of practice.

"We always have about three students after three to four years because most people who would become radiologists get a shortcut to radiographers," he said.

Ms Opendi said government is prioritising study areas that do not have enough manpower such as these to make sure they give scholarships to students to do the courses. "We shall give scholarships to more students to do these courses to fill the missing gaps. And we are also planning on increasing the salaries of health workers so that more get motivated to join the field," she said.

THE NUMBERS

Distribution. Ministry of Health records indicate that the country has 48 radiologist but 11 have already retired, leaving only 37 in active service meant to serve the population of about 37 million Ugandans. This means one radiologist should handle more than 850,000 people.