

Mobile herbalists banned

By Carol Kasujja

A car parks every evening next to a bank in Ntinda, a Kampala suburb with a loudspeaker perched atop it. A man beckons passers-by to go to the car for treatment for a range of illnesses including cancer, cough, syphilis, diabetes and ulcers.

This has been the trend in Kampala and most towns across the country. Other herbalists go on foot, use motorbikes or buses vending different concoctions purported to cure illnesses.

The trend is coming to an end after the National Drug Authority (NDA) yesterday during a media breakfast announced a new crackdown on unlicensed herbalists, including hawkers and vendors of drug concoctions.

The warning comes after the number of people claiming to provide cures for all sorts of sicknesses from the ordinary to the world's most deadly diseases continues to rise, with unsuspecting members of the public turning to them rather than conventional health facilities.

"Starting next financial year, we are going to arrest mobile herbal medicine sellers and advertisers. It is not about money, but people's health. Those drugs being sold on the streets and buses have not gone through our laboratories for screening, but we see them being sold and advertised on radio and television," Victoria Nambasa, the NDA acting director product safety said.

Nambasa also called on people, especially cancer patients and people living with HIV to desist from buying herbal medicine from the streets because most herbal medicine in the country is misused and does not meet the standards.

Addressing journalists, Donna Kusemererwa, the NDA executive director, said a good number of herbalists are taking advantage of the emotional vulnerability of the sick and



Victoria Nambasa (left) during the press conference

suffering public to make a living.

"If the herbalist is not registered with NDA, do not buy that medicine. If he/she has no permanent address do not buy. If the herbalist says one drug can heal over seven diseases, do not buy. There is no drug like that. We have done enough sensitisation, the next step is enforcement. We are going to work with the relevant authorities, like the Police, to eliminate all unregistered herbalists," Kusemererwa said.

She also said they have introduced a whistle-blower reward for people who expose fake drug dealers in the country, so that they can improve efficiency at the authority.

David Nahamya, the director of inspectorate and enforcement, called on the public not to shun the hepatitis B vaccine because the suspected hepatitis B vaccine, which was taken to Geneva for



Donna Kusemererwa

testing turned out to be okay.

"We got some preliminary results from the tests we did on the suspected hepatitis B vaccines and so far all results are good. We are working with World Health Organisation (WHO) and a company in UK to get conclusive results," Nahamya said.

In a move to modernise herbal medicine use, Cabinet in 2013 approved a Bill to regulate the use of indigenous and complementary medicines.

The Indigenous and Complementary Medicines Bill 2013, which has been shelved since then, seeks to establish a council responsible for controlling and regulating the practice of indigenous medicine, define their roles, register and license all practitioners of indigenous medicine and to provide for offences against the act.

Kusemererwa called for the law to be passed to help weed out fake herbalists.

Speaking to *New Vision*, Dr Joseph Baguma, the executive director of THETA Uganda, a local consortium of herbal medicine researchers, said NDA has made a good move to ban mobile herbalists because most of them are not genuine.

"That is a good step. People who are genuine should have permanent premises and a proper address. Most of the herbalists who are hawking medicines are conning people," Baguma said.