

Health

Strike

Nurses

Remuneration

By Vision Reporters

The lowest-paid nurse or midwife will earn sh2.5m if the demands by the Uganda Nurses and Midwives Union (UNMU) come to fruit, details of the union's talks with the Government reveal.

The union called off a nationwide sit-down strike over low pay and difficult working conditions, which had been planned to start yesterday.

Patients in various hospitals previously worried about the impending industrial action yesterday appeared relieved at the smooth operations.

A *New Vision* survey established that threats of a strike caused panic, but its postponement brought a sigh of relief to patients at health facilities countrywide.

Representatives of the union met with President Yoweri Museveni on Monday and agreed to call off their strike while their demands were being addressed.

Paul Henry Byenkya, the general secretary of UNMU, confirmed yesterday that the health workers had agreed to postpone their strike for a week, pending a government review of their demands.

"We met the President and after conveying our grievances to him, we resolved to postpone our strike for a week as we wait for the outcome of his directives to government bodies," Byenkya said.

"We held a productive meeting with leaders of the nurses and midwives union. We are pleased that they have agreed to continue working and serving the people," the Prime Minister, Dr Ruhakana Rugunda, stated on Twitter after the meeting.

He praised the leadership of the National Organisation of Trade Unions (NOTU) for playing a constructive role in the discussions between the Government and the nurses and midwives union.

In their list of demands, the union wants a speedy implementation of nurses and midwives' schemes of service, salary increment and allowances.

According to Byenkya, Museveni told the union he had directed the Ministry of Public Service to produce the schemes of service without further delay.

Leaders of nurses, midwives explain deal with government



Nurses in the Postnatal Ward attending to patients at Kawempe Mulago referral hospital yesterday. Nurses and midwives have called off their sit-down strike for another week. Photo by Ashraf Kasirye

On the request for salary increment, the President told the union to be patient while the salary review committee he established scrutinises their proposals.

If approved, the lowest-paid nurse or midwife will earn sh2.5m. Currently, this category of health workers earn an average of about sh450,000.

"We expect a response from the Government by Saturday afternoon, beyond which we will decide whether to proceed with our strike or not," Byenkya said.

The threat of industrial action by nurses and midwives comes days after doctors suspended their sit-down strike that had brought work in public health facilities to a standstill over the past three weeks.

The doctors want the Government to increase their salaries and allocate more funding for medicines, vaccines and medical supplies.

The Government had committed to respond to their grievances by December 15 and plans to allocate sh41b as supplementary budget to tackle their demands.

Last month, the Speaker of Parliament, Rebecca Kadaga, said Parliament's committee on health would investigate the medics' demands and present its report to the House.

Nurses and midwives are frontline healthcare givers, who play a pivotal role in ensuring that patients get quality care. They form the largest portion of the health workforce.

The group has previously complained about several issues affecting their work, including terms and conditions of service, lack of promotion and recognition, and image.

Back to work

At Mulago National Referral Hospital, nurses showed up for duty in all wards, including the Emergency and Accident Ward, Acute ward, children's wards and the immunisation section.

George Lutwama, a resident of Bweyogerere in Kampala, said his patient, who sustained injuries after a bodaboda accident, has received treatment at the health facility.

"The nurses have been around, attending to patients. I am not aware

that the nurses were about to go on strike," he said.

Mulago Hospital's spokesperson, Enock Kusasira said the nurses are working and all hospital wards are fully covered, adding that there is no cause for alarm.

At Kisenyi Hospital in Kampala central division and Kiswah Health Centre III, which are both facilities of the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), nurses and midwives were in the wards caring for the patients.

"I came for my routine check-up and I have received care," Sabrina Anyango, a mother who had come for antenatal care at Kisenyi Hospital, said. The hospital's administrators, however, declined to speak to the media.

KCCA spokesperson Peter Kauju said all KCCA facilities have a different arrangement and the nurses and midwives were working normally.

At Kiruddu Hospital, the nurses at the medical outpatient ward reported to work but a source at the hospital described them as "unenthusiastic".

In Kyankwanzi district, John Bosco Sserebe, the district health officer, said: "Our team has since been on duty even during the time of the doctors' strike."

In Kiboga district, the LCS chairperson, Israel Yiga, appealed to the nurses and midwives to wait for the salary review commission to come out with salary structure recommendations.

"It is better for the Government to grant the nurses and other civil servants the appropriate remuneration. However, if everybody goes on strike, the entire health system will be paralysed," he warned.

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