

HIV patients share ARVs as shortage hits Lamwo

Effects. Patients say because of inadequate dosage, opportunistic infections such as flu and cough have set in.

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LAMWO. Ms Christine Ayet, 55, a resident of Kamama Central village in Moroto Parish, Palabek Gem Sub-county, Lamwo District, tested HIV positive in 2011 at Palabek Gem Health Centre III.

She was enrolled on Septrin medication and then antiretroviral therapy (a combination of Lamivudine, Niverapine and Zidovudine tablets) in 2012.

However, for the last two months, life has not been the same for Ms Ayet, who has started sharing a tin of her life-saving medication with other patients following acute shortages of ARV drugs in the district.

Ms Ayet says in July, she only took Septrin, adding that in August when the facility received a limited supply of ARVs, health workers opted to ration the available stock.

"I used to get a tin of Lamivudine, which contains 60 tablets for my two months' medication, but since August, this reduced to only 15 tablets, since we had to share one tin with three other patients," she says.

"I am really weak at the moment because simple sicknesses such as cough, flu and diarrhoea keep on attacking me. I don't know whether

"We are afraid that if the ARV drug stock out persists, we shall lose many of our colleagues. Our colleagues are now developing side effects such as sore throats, paralysed limbs, swollen faces and loss of weight; we need urgent government intervention," SIMON ORACH, SECRETARY OTUN-GORO HIV/AIDS TASKFORCE

I will survive if these drugs are not supplied by government," she adds.

Ms Ayet, a small scale fuel dealer, is among hundreds of other people living with HIV/AIDS in the district, whose lives are at risk over shortage of drugs.

Florence Akwero, 50, a mother of six and resident of Dyang B village in Palabek Gem Sub-county, shares a similar plight.

She enrolled on ARV treatment from Kal Health Centre III in 2010, a year after testing positive for the virus. Her health took a downturn in September after defaulting on the medication for two months.

Ms Akwero says she had only been taking Septrin tablets given at Palabek Health Centre III since August.

"I didn't have money to buy my medication (ARVs) from elsewhere. We were told to keep taking septrin



Last resort. Ms Christine Ayet displays a tin of ARVs that she has been sharing with three other people. PHOTO BY JULIUS OCUINGI

drugs but they weren't supplied. I nearly died of cough, malaria and diarrhoea," she says.

The patients, who are part of the 32 members of Otun-goro HIV/AIDS Taskforce in the sub-county, recently raised the red flag following ARV drug shortages in the district.

The group is supported by Lutheran World Federation, a non-governmental organisation, that sensitises communities on HIV. Mr Simon Orach, 31, the group secretary, says their plea to the district officials to alert the government about their plight has fallen on deaf ears.

Fears

"We are afraid that if the ARV drug stock out persists, we shall lose many of our colleagues. Our colleagues are now developing side effects such as sore throats, paralysed limbs, swollen faces and loss of weight; we need urgent government intervention," Mr Orach laments.

Mr Orach claims that some of the patients in the group, including Michael Oketayot, Martin Oloya, Helen Oyella, Okeny Nyok, and Joel Odongo, have passed on in the past three months.

"My son was on ARV medication, but he couldn't access medication from the health facilities where he

gets them from. He got ill from meningitis and malaria, and we couldn't afford to take him to a better facility or buy ARVs from another private health facility," says Mr Otiri Tito, 66, the father

NMS RESPONDS



Mr Moses Kamabare, the NMS executive director, says the ARV drug shortage in the district could have resulted from a mismatch in orders from the district health department.

"We haven't received any such complaints and in case they made complaints, I have to verify it from office," Mr Kamabare says. He shrugs off claims that the drug shortage could be a national issue. "If this is national, ARV drug stock outs should have begun from health facilities in places like Kampala but not a small health facility in Lamwo," Mr Kamabare says.

of the late Odongo. The in-charge of Palabek Gem Health Centre III only identified as Eve, and the laboratory technician, Mr Thomas Oyoo, declined to comment on the matter.

At Padibe Health Centre IV, inconsistent supply of ARV drugs has been registered since September. According to the in-charge of the health facility's drug store, Mr George Pacoto, they have not had Tenofovir, Lamivudine and Efavirenz, all first line ARV drugs, since September.

Mr Pacoto notes that the facility only has 114 tins of Niverapin, 28 of atazanavir/ Ritonavir, 117 of Septrin, 629t of Lamivudine/Zidovudine (all for adults), and only four tins of Lopinavir/Ritonavir for children.

NMS blamed

He adds that the emergency request sent to the National Medical Stores (NMS) for more drugs has not yet been honoured.

Mr Pacoto estimates the number of patients that consumes Tenofovir, Lamivudine and Efavirenz at 3,000, of the 4,000 users of ARVs.

"The expectant mothers are the mostly affected by this stock out since they stand a chance of passing the virus to their unborn babies," he adds.

The district HIV focal point person, Dr Francis Okumu, blames the shortage of ARV drugs on NMS. "As a district, we have done our part in ensuring that health facilities get the right medicines, but NMS has on many occasions frustrated us by delivery of inadequate drugs and those due to expire. We believe the Ministry of Health can act fast to help our people," Dr Okumu says.

He adds that skipping the routine dosage could lead to drug resistance.

However, the district chief administrative officer, Mr Patrick Olila, blames the shortage of drugs on the influx of the South Sudanese refugees in the district. Currently about 43,000 South Sudanese refugees are settled in the three camps of Palabek Ogili, Palabek Kal and Palabek Gem, all in Lamwo.

"We can't have the drugs in store for long if the consumers are increasing very fast every day. We are worried that with the high numbers of refugees in our district, we shall not be able to effectively utilise the drugs," Mr Olila says.

The in-charge of Palabek Ogili Health Centre III, Dr Tom Ogwang, confirms that they have enrolled a number of South Sudanese refugees on ART therapy since March.

When contacted, the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Health, Dr Diana Atwine, says such complaints had not yet reached her ministry and but promised to follow up.

briefly

By-law on fake inputs

KAMULI. Kamuli District on Monday adopted a by-law that bans the sale of counterfeit agro inputs. The by-law, passed by the district council on April 26 and signed by the district chairman in September, prohibits the trade, distribution, use and possession of counterfeit agricultural inputs in the district. The district chairperson, Mr Thomas Kategere, warned that the district will not be a dumping ground for fake goods. [Sam Opolo Caleb]

Staff warned on graft

MBALE. The assistant commissioner for human resources in the ministry of Water, Ms Leofida Oyella, has warned ministry staff against engaging in corruption. Ms Oyella made the warning during the technical support review meeting at Mount Elgon Hotel in Mbalale on Monday. "Use your offices and positions to serve the public not enrich yourselves," she said. Ms Jolly Barigye, the community development specialist, challenged the staff to maintain the proper dressing code and support government to extend safer water to rural communities. [Leonard Mukooli]

Committees approved

BUNYANGABU. Bunyangabu District council has approved new statutory committees that will help improve service delivery. The district council meeting chaired by Speaker Moses Ikagbaya on Monday approved members of the district service commission, public accounts and district land committees. The Local Government Act requires each district to have a service commission comprising the chairperson and such other members as a district council may determine. Members of district service commission include Mr John Kasajja Tigwezi, Mr Mate Mutusera, Ms Veronica Kabanyoro Mutabazi, Ms Barbara Clovis Nyakatura and Mr Roy Inumba Kiiza. [Alex Ashaba]

Staff want better facilities

MASINDI. Healthy workers in Masindi District have urged government to improve their working conditions by renovating and building new healthy centres. Speaking in a health meeting at the district headquarters recently, Mr Alunni Philam, a clinical officer at Kyatini Health Centre III, said he is at a risk of contracting air borne diseases since the clinic he works from has damaged windows which are permanently closed. The district health officer, Dr John Turyaganku, said they are aware of the problem but said there are other emergency health issues they are still handling. [Ismael Bategeka]

Chief rallies Baganda

WAKISO. Buganda Kingdom subjects have been urged to contribute towards the construction of a new house for the kingdom's Mumukya chief. The old house was constructed in 1927 and is now dilapidated. "We have already drawn a plan and it has been approved by Wakiso Town Council," Mr Edward Jonah Nsubuka, the chief said yesterday. "We also call upon well-wishers to help us in this cause," Mr Nsubuka said. [James Kabengwa]