

MAK ENGINEERING STUDENT CAUGHT WITH GOVT DRUGS

BY CHARLES ETUKURI

Acting on a tip-off, the State House Health Monitoring Unit (HMU) on Thursday raided a student's hostel in Makerere-Kikoni, in Kawempe division, Kampala district and recovered several boxes of government drugs and medical equipment.

Among the items recovered were antiretroviral drugs for the management and treatment of HIV, expired HIV testing kits, masks, syringes and vacutainers, which were being repackaged for sale.

The key suspect, Blair Muhoozi, a final year Makerere University engineering student, was arrested at Jerusalem Hostel in Kikoni while taking one of the boxes to a client.

Six suspects who were found repackaging expired drugs and equipment were also arrested.

"We were working on a tip-off by the community that someone has been off-loading and loading a number of boxes that contain drugs and other medical equipment. And when we were told that on Wednesday night, a Fusco truck brought boxes of the supposed items, we decided to raid the hostel.

"Working with the local area police and security, we went to Kikoni and discovered a huge assortment of medical drugs and equipment. The operatives think this has been going for some time," Dr Warren Namaara, the executive



Muhoozi (left) upon arrest at Jerusalem Hostel in Kikoni, Kampala, on Thursday. (Scan picture using the Vision Digital Experience to watch video)

director of HMU, told journalists

HMU is an official watchdog in Uganda set up by the President to ensure an efficient and accessible healthcare system. It focuses on fighting corruption, investigating mismanagement, and cracking down on unqualified medical practitioners to protect the public.

"The questions are; where do they get the expired drugs and medical equipment? Who supplies them? Where do they finally end up," Namaara said.

He also said they discovered the suspects had labels printed from Nasser Road to re-label the drugs

after removing the expiry stickers on the original boxes.

"Our guess is that there is a lot of relabelling that the suspects have been doing. You get expired drugs, relabel them and you put them back on the market. The doctors use these drugs, patients don't improve and you wonder why. Patients get resistance. Remember, each time you misuse any drug of any description, you create super bugs and next time you are sick, you can't get any response to medication of any type. It is very dangerous," Namaara added.

He said all the drugs and

WHAT KEY SUSPECT SAYS

In an interview with *The Weekend Vision*, the key suspect, Blair Muhoozi, confirmed receipt of the government drugs and medical equipment, noting that they were repackaging them for sale to pharmacies on Wilson Road, private clinics and mask vendors around the country.

A fellow student at the hostel confirmed that several trucks had been seen dropping and picking the loot after it had been repackaged.

"We usually see him changing the packages. He had employed about six youths that were helping him," the students said.

Stolen drugs are frequently moved across porous borders to South Sudan, the DR Congo and Kenya.

equipment recovered were clearly labelled "Government of Uganda."

"Unfortunately, it's a very sad story, but that is just one area. Who knows there are no other areas in this city. The suspect we got was a university student. Where does this person sell these drugs? Who buys them and who is supplying them," Namaara said.

Most of the expired drugs and medical equipment recovered had labels of Kisubi and Buwambo hospitals.