

ARV drug resistance worries experts

MASAKA

By Dismus Buregyeya

Uganda Cares, one of the country's largest providers of AIDS treatment, prevention and support services, has expressed concern over the rising levels of ARV drug resistance among people living with HIV and the related costly treatment.

So far, a total of 15 cases with symptoms of ARV drug resistance have been enrolled on the third line treatment, according to the Uganda Cares country director, Dr John Ssali.

"We are experiencing an emerging ARV drug resistance trend on the first and second lines of treatment," he said.

He said the prevailing ARV drug stockouts and adherence challenges should be addressed to control the rising numbers of HIV-positive people referred to the complicated third-line treatment.

The chairperson of the parliamentary committee on HIV/AIDS, Judith Alyek, said they received reports from Uganda Virus Research Institute indicating that 30% of the clients enrolled on ARV drugs had developed drug resistance.

Speaking to the parliamentary committee on HIV/AIDS at the Uganda Cares centre at Masaka Hospital recently, Ssali called for government intervention to save the situation.

Ssali added that Uganda Cares was shouldering the burden of meeting costs for clients referred to third line treatment to Mildmay and Uganda Joint Research Centre in Kampala.



MPs visiting the Uganda Cares Centre at Masaka Hospital. Photo by Dismus Buregyeya

"The right order would be for us to take the third line drugs to the patients in their respective communities and not us ferrying the clients to Kampala," he said.

He said it costs \$15m for Uganda Cares to handle clients on third-line treatment for the 15 months.

Ssali said it costs sh650,000 per month to treat each client enrolled on third line treatment.

He cited Kalangala islands and the fishing landing sites on Lake Victoria among the most affected communities with clients suffering from drug resistance.

The Kalangala district health officer, Dr Hilary Bitakaramire, said Bufumira Health Centre is the most affected unit as it missed out on the recent drug supply.

"We are lucky that we received a consignment of ARV drugs

A total of 78 clients are on second-line treatment in Kalangala

recently, but they were not enough to serve Bufumira Health Centre," he said.

Bitakaramire said a total of 78 clients had been switched to second-line treatment in Kalangala district.

Ssali said the Masaka area had been saved by the buffer supplies of ARV drugs in Uganda Cares and other organisations. Uganda Cares

has enrolled 14,000 clients on ARV drugs in the area.

Dr Sulaiman Kawayo, a senior medical officer at Uganda Cares in the central region, said clients with drug resistance can infect other people.

Some of the clients at Uganda Cares Centre in Masaka Hospital told *New Vision* that Septrine stockouts had affected them.

The Masaka district health officer, Dr Stuart Musisi said the district was also facing stockouts of ARV drugs for children.

The district HIV focal person, Olivia Nakanwagi, said the HIV Test-and-Treat campaign had created a high demand for ARV drugs resulting in stockouts.

The Kyotera Woman MP, Robina Ssentongo, said: "The initiative to provide a special unit to the elderly is welcome. Old people need privacy and special treatment."