

OPINION

Do more to curb doctors' brain drain

Uganda Medical & Dental Practitioners Council (UMDPC) reports that in the last five years almost 700 doctors have got clearance to leave the country to work abroad.

UMDPC said they have issued certificates of good standing to Ugandan doctors wanting to leave for Botswana, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, UK and Canada.

The figure is at once alarming, but does not paint the whole picture.

For starters not all doctors recommended by UMDPC actually leave the country, like a visa application, the other country is under no obligation to take you on.

That should give some comfort. But the more disturbing trend is that not all doctors even in the country are actually practicing medicine having hang up their stethoscope to go into administration or business. If you factor that in the 700-odd doctors supposed to have left the country maybe the least of our worries.

UMDPC argues that the brain drain is a function of the poor conditions that doctors in Uganda work under. Beyond low pay, inadequate medical supplies and equipment, lack of promotions and jobs and harassment from state actors has played a part.

In a country which does not match the World Health Organisation (WHO) minimum requirement of a doctor per 10,000 citizens, which doctors are expensive to train, it is a scandal that we should be losing them to other countries for reasons that can be sorted out relatively easily.

As the figure of out of practice doctors still living in the country shows, it would be counterproductive to even try and prevent doctors from leaving the country.

Health services as well as education services, are critical to the improvement of the quality of a country's human resource and by extension critical to economic development.

It is obvious that we need to improve the working conditions of our health workers not just improve their remuneration, so that they can practice what they are trained for, derive the satisfaction that comes with that and remove that incentive for them to leave the country.

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