

NMS seeks sh60b for ARVs

By Paul Kiwuuwa

The National Medical Stores (NMS) has asked the Parliament budget committee for sh17b to enable them execute their mandate of procuring, storing and distributing medicines to public health facilities in the country.

NMS general manager Moses Kamabare and Sarah Opendi, the minister of state for health, appeared before the committee to defend the NMS budget for 2018/2019.

Kamabare said the critical areas that needed funding in the 2018/2019 budget were: Sh60b for the procurement of Antiretroviral (ARV) drugs, sh44b for clinical laboratory equipment, sh30b for antimalarial drugs.

Also sh17b is needed for safe blood collection by the Uganda Blood Transfusion Services, sh8b for vaccines, and sh5b to cater for procurement of drugs

for emergencies such as cholera, Ebola, Marburg and typhoid out-breaks. Others are sh5b for Maama kits for mothers' deliveries in public health facilities.

In the 2018/2019 proposed budget Frame Work Paper, NMS was allocated sh278b. However, they have a funding gap of sh17b.

"With such a funding gap, NMS will continue to request Parliament for supplementary budgets, because we can't provide the required essential medicines to the health facilities," Kamabare told the committee.

Kamabare told legislators that there was need for procurement of ARV, to cater for the increased number of patients on ART treatment.

"The implementation of the test and treat policy for HIV affected people is well intended, but has no significant additional funding to take care of new patients," Kamabare said.

He said the people who have enrolled on the test and treat policy countywide are 1.1 million, but more 300 people may be enrolled in the next five years and will need the medication.

"The Government should

be on standby so that, in case the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the US government's initiative to help save the lives of those affected by HIV/AIDS around the world stops funding, we have a fallback position," Kamabare said.

He said PEPFAR contributes 80%, while the Global Fund provides 20% of the actual ARVs. "Our role is to store them and deliver them safely to the health centres," she said. Kamabare, however, found a difficult time convincing the MPs why they should appropriate more funds, yet more drugs continue to expire in health facilities.

Committee chairperson Amos Lugolobi (Ntengeru North MP) also asked

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ The Ministry of Health is set to destroy between 1,200 and 1,500 tonnes of expired drugs, worth billions of shillings

Kamabare for the justification for NMS being appropriated more funds. "The Ministry of Health is set to destroy between 1,200 and 1,500 tonnes of expired

drugs, worth billions of shillings. The exercise will see the NMS picking expired drugs from 6,619 government and private non-profit facilities across the country; can you explain?" Lugolobi said.

Buyaga West MP Barnabas Tinkasimire asked Kamabare to provide the total budget required for the incineration of the expired drugs.

"Apparently, it is still a potential risk to fund these critical areas because government does not have enough resources, is there an alternative way we can get the money?" Lugolobi asked.

In his defence, Kamabare said all district health officers and the in-charge personnel at health facilities are to blame. They requisition for drugs which are not needed for treatments at particular times and these end up expiring.

The committee told Kamabare to avail all the inventory of all brands of expired drugs to be incinerated, its tonnage, the list of all hospitals, health centres and private clinics as the sources of expired drugs, and the budget for the incineration.