

BY TONNY ABET

KAMPALA. Leaders of the Uganda Medical Association (UMA) and the Federation of Uganda Medical Interns (FUMI) have rejected the government's reported plan to delay the graduation of medical students until after they complete their one-year internship.

Currently, students pursuing the Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBChB) spend five years in medical school before graduating. They then undertake a mandatory one-year internship. The arrangement also applies, with variations, to other health-related programmes such as nursing and pharmacy.

However, according to a report published by the State-owned *Weekend Vision* newspaper on February 28, the Ministry of Health intends to restructure

the system so that students graduate only after completing their internship.

Dr Joel Mirembe, the secretary general of UMA, criticised the plan, arguing that it seeks to merge internship with university training and remove government financial support for interns.

"The Ministry of Health (MoH) plan to stop paying intern doctors' apprenticeship is a high level of shrewdness and gravely indicates how MoH leaders are misleading and advising the presidency to appease at the expense of quality healthcare training and regulation of doctors," he said in a statement at the weekend.

Dr Diana Atwine, the Permanent Sec-

retary at the Ministry of Health, indicated that the new approach would take effect in July. Speaking at the launch of the National Knowledge Hub at Kawempe National Referral Hospital last Tuesday, she said the reforms are intended to strengthen quality assurance in the training of health workers.

But medical leaders argue that internship is not merely an academic extension but a supervised professional phase critical to patient safety and clinical competence.

"This MoH proposal to stop funding medical internships is deeply concerning. Internship is not a luxury—it is a mandatory, supervised training phase that safeguards patient safety and pre-

pares doctors for independent practice," Dr Mirembe said.

He warned that the proposal could further strain an already overstretched health system.

"The country has roughly one doctor per 10,000–25,000 people (far below the WHO-recommended threshold of 1 per 1,000), and the public sector staffing gap for doctors has persistently hovered around 40–50 percent vacancies at various levels of care," he said.

Dr Allan Okwir, the secretary general of FUMI, also said the proposed changes risk redefining interns as students in order to shift government responsibility.

"Medical interns are not students, and any attempt to package them as stu-

dents only achieves shifting responsibilities from the government, yet they are the biggest beneficiaries of the internship," he said.

He added that interns already undergo structured assessments.

"Intern pharmacists sit for pre-internship and post-internship exams; all these are shared quality checking measures that these cadres go through to ensure that they are checked. Quality should be continuously built into medical professionals and not just assumed to be attached at the end," he said.

Dr Okwir also expressed concern that extending the academic timeline could expose parents to higher tuition costs in a liberalised education market.

Doctors oppose plan to delay interns graduation