

Gov't to upscale use of Biometric machines to monitor health workers



CSOs during a meeting with Parliament Health Committee to discuss their proposals to Ministry of Health Ministerial Policy Statement FY 2016/17 yesterday 4th April 2016

The Government through the Health Monitoring Unit has embarked on installation of Biometric machines in different public health centers across the country, to monitor performance and attendance of health workers in local, regional and national referral hospitals.

Appearing before the Parliamentary committee on today 5th April 2016, Dr. Julian Nabatanzi, the Deputy Director Health Monitoring Unit said the move is intended to reduce on increased absenteeism among health workers. Presenting the Unit's Health Monitoring report for the year 2014/2015, Dr. Nabatanzi told the MPs that absenteeism in health centers especially Health Center IIIs had increased in the country.

"Absenteeism is getting worse, during our monitoring work, we found that most of the health workers were absent and this

problem is common with district hospitals," said Dr. Nabatanzi.

Explaining how the Biometric system will work, Dr. Nabatanzi noted that the machines will enable Government identify health workers who don't work and those who dodge work. She noted that the Machines had so far been installed in six public hospitals, in districts of Mukono, Kampala, Mbarara and Gulu among other districts, on a pilot basis.

On the supply of drugs, the CSOs recommended that the Ministry of Finance enhances the National Medical Stores drugs and supplies budget by 5% annually to cater for the ever increasing patient load as well as the revision of the minimum health care package which is district or regional specific. This should be accompanied by reviewing the health /procurement guidelines on HCIIIs to enable them make their own requisitions,

Responding to this, the Unit revealed to MPs that most hospitals were facing drug stock outs due to drug theft by Drug Delivery Officers and drivers of the National Medical Stores (NMS), who deliver medicines to Health Centers. "When these Officers deliver drugs, they don't give out the exact number of drugs they are given from the stores that is why we are seeing continued drug stock outs. Store managers at different health centers need to be vigilant when receiving drugs," said Nabatanzi.

Dr. Nabatanzi today appeared before the Parliament Health Committee alongside Health Ministers Dr. Elioda Tumwesigye and Sarah Opendi among other Ministry Officials, to defend the ministry's budget for the financial year 2016/2017.

In his submission, Elioda Tumwesigye, the Minister for Health told the MPs that in order to do away with absenteeism of health workers, the Ministry has established constituency task forces chaired by area MPs to help improve and monitor health delivery services at the local level. "These committees will be chaired by MPs, Residential district commissioners (RDCs) church leaders to monitor service delivery. The task forces will be expected to issue reports and action be taken against those health officers who don't want to work," said Elioda.

The MPs also recommended that the funding for primary health care, be increased to provide all the necessary health needs such as drugs and in response to this, Elioda told the MPs that the Ministry is considering increasing the operational funds for primary health care to Sh 35b to make the current facilities operate at a reasonable level.

The Ministry which is seeking approval of Sh 1.8 trillion budgets for the financial year 2016/2017 also wants Sh 36b to cater for wage of 3,542 health workers, to meet the 72% target by the end of 2016/2017 financial. In their health position paper, the CSOs urged the government to prioritize the recruitment of more staff in the health sector particularly qualified health workers to enhance sectoral performance.

Meanwhile the committee Chaired by Mbarara municipality MP Medard Bitekyerezo, demanded that the management of district hospitals be re-centralized, saying the districts had failed to manage local hospitals. "Most off these districts have failed to run hospitals; we should have these hospitals re-centralized. The hospitals are being run by relatives of district bosses, so they cannot be disciplined," said Medard Bitekyerezo the committee chairperson.

This meeting came a day after Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) under their umbrella body the Civil Society Budget Advocacy (CSBAG) met the Parliament Health Committee and listed increased financing to curb HIV/Aids prevalence, drugs supply, remuneration and recruitment of health workers as key funding areas by the government for the health sector in the 2016/17 financial year budget. Appearing before the Parliament's committee on health, to present their views on the 2016/2017 budget for the health sector, on Monday, the CSOs told MPs that despite the growing HIV/AIDs prevalence, the sector has gross under prioritized financing for HIV/AIDs alleviation. The CSOs also want the Ministry of health to engage district health officers at local government level to finance the operationalization of the HUMC in the lower health facilities, specifically orienting these committees on their oversight role and need for follow up on institution of new HUMCs for those that have served.