

BY JAMES OWICH

Pader grappling with severe shortage of health workers

PADER. Public health facilities in Pader District are grappling with severe shortage of critical healthcare staff amid rising demand for quality health services in the district.

At Okinga Health Centre III, in Okinga West Village, Acholibur Sub-county, the health facility is being manned by seven of the required 19 staff.

Although it has a laboratory, a consultation room, maternity and admission wards and an Outpatient Department (OPD), the healthcare workers there are overwhelmed by the number of patients. On average, between 900 and 1,200 patients seek treatment at the facility each month at the OPD.

Meanwhile, admissions range from between 50 to 80 every month. Around 15 to 30 babies are delivered each month at the facility, which serves a population of

more than 15,000 people.

Ms Stella Daisy Acan, the nursing officer-in-charge of the facility, said about the overwhelming number of patients amidst shortage of staff, they are constrained to conduct outreach programmes to bring services closer to communities living in remote areas.

"So, our outreach programme currently stands at only 35 percent," she revealed.

Ms Acan added that nearly all health facilities in Pader District are facing a similar problem.

Pader is among the five districts that make up Acholi Sub-region. By the end

of 2024, the district had 38 health facilities, including two health centre IVs, 13 health centre IIIs, and 24 health IIs and four medical doctors, treating a population of about 240,000 people. The

healthcare workers' staffing level

currently stands at 38 percent. In total, there are only 342 healthcare workers manning the 38 facilities. Meanwhile, nine of its 18 sub-counties lack a public health unit.

Dr Benson Oyoo, the acting Pader District Health Officer, said 120 babies are delivered each day

in the district, adding that there is a need for the government to recruit

more health workers in the district.

Currently, patients with complex medical emergencies travel to Acholpili Military Health Centre IV or out of the district, especially Kitgum General Hospital and Gulu Regional Referral Hospital.

Col (rtd) Fearless Obwoya, the Pader District chairperson, urged the Ministry of Health to upgrade Pajule Health Centre IV to a district hospital.

"All health centre IIIs in the district do not have maternity wards. One day, when I was on a monitoring visit, I found six expectant mothers at Pajule Health Centre IV. But the facility only has two beds. The other four mothers had to deliver on the floor," he revealed.

Mr Obwoya said public health facilities are overwhelmed by patients

from neighbouring districts. "Since we are centrally located, our health facilities are receiving patients from districts such as Omoro and Agago... Coupled with low staffing, our healthcare workers are now being overwhelmed with work... Sometimes if one healthcare worker is sick, the facility is forced to close," he added.

However, Health minister Dr Jane Ruth Aceng said the government does not have the funds required for the upgrade of the facility to a district hospital.

The minister explained that upgrading a health centre IV to a district hospital, requires between Shs5 billion and Shs20 billion, which she described as an expensive venture government is not ready to undertake at the moment.

