

The project aims to bridge persistent communication gaps experts say contribute to delayed care and mismanagement of diseases, among others.

BY SYLVIA NAMAGEMBE

Mulago National Referral Hospital has unveiled a new digital health-education initiative aimed at tackling widespread health misinformation and improving how medical information is communicated to patients and the public.

The pilot project, launched on Tuesday at Mulago, seeks to bridge persistent communication gaps that health experts say contribute to delayed care, poor treatment adherence, and mismanagement of diseases.

Dr Justus Atuhaire, the project lead, said several Ugandans struggle to understand basic medical terms, while some health workers lack the training to break down complex conditions for laypeople—leaving a fertile ground for rumours and misinformation.

“People in need of care can neither explain nor understand their illnesses,” he said.

“The information we give them gets diluted along the way, and this affects how they manage diseases, whether they return for review, and whether they adhere to medication instructions,” he said.

The project will produce short animated videos that simplify key public-health topics such as water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), nutrition, cervical cancer, hepatitis, and emergency services.

Mulago pilots digital health project to fight misinformation



Dr John Ssekabira (right), who represented the Mulago National Referral Hospital Executive Director, Dr Rose Byanyima, with other officials during the e-content project kick off at the facility in Kampala on Tuesday. PHOTO/SYLVIA NAMAGEMBE

Dr Atuhaire said the initiative will also introduce “presentation champions”—trained communicators who will deliver the content directly to communities.

“Doctors are not always skilled teachers,” he noted. “These champions will ensure communities receive clear, digestible information.”

The pilot phase will focus on Namanve Industrial Park and surrounding schools, an area hosting thousands of young, low-income workers who often lack access to preventive health services due to long working hours and low earnings.

“The population of Namanve alone

TARGET POPULATION

Mulago hospital’s new digital health-education initiative aims at tackling widespread health misinformation and improving how medical information is communicated to the public. The pilot phase will focus on Namanve Industrial Park and surrounding schools, an area hosting several workers who often lack access to preventive health services due to long working hours and low earnings.

can be equal to a whole district,” he said. “Many cannot afford routine check-ups like cervical cancer screening or basic disease testing.”

Namanve Industrial Park—on Kampala–Jinja highway—sits on 2,209 acres and is the largest of the 22 industrial and business parks managed by the Uganda Investment Authority.

To ensure broad access, the health content will be shared through websites and various social media platforms, Ministry of Health platforms and internal industrial-park communication channels. Versions compatible with basic mobile phones will also

be developed for low-bandwidth users.

Impact of misinformation

Dr Rosemary Byanyima, the executive director of Mulago National Referral Hospital, said the facility continues to receive patients at advanced stages of illness because they misinterpret early symptoms or trust unverified remedies circulating online.

“We spend enormous resources treating conditions that could have been prevented or managed early,” Dr Byanyima said.

She added: “We see the consequences of misinformation every day—from patients abandoning treatment midway to those relying on harmful remedies.”

Mr Jung SanHoo, a senior advisor at the Korea Foundation for International Healthcare (KOFIH), one of the implementing partners, said the initiative aligns with global efforts to promote accurate medical information following the rise of health misinformation during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

“Health misinformation is now a global threat,” he said, citing KOFIH studies showing digital education tools can improve patient knowledge retention by up to 40 percent.

Mulago hospital hopes to expand the model to other high-population, low-income communities in Kampala City and later to regional referral hospitals if the pilot proves effective.

Officials say the initiative could become a key tool in closing Uganda’s widening health-information gap and promoting timely health-seeking behaviour.