

Address challenges facing health sector

This week, the Ministry of Health released the 2024/2025 Financial Year national health facility performance rankings, naming the best and worst performing districts, sub-regions, and referral hospitals. Mbale Regional Referral Hospital topped the list with 67 percent, followed by Mengo Hospital at 55 percent. St Mary's Hospital Lacor, St Francis Nsambya Hospital and Fort Portal Regional Referral Hospital each scored 41 percent.

In the Local Government rankings, Kiruhura emerged as the best-performing district, scoring 92.3 percent, followed by Bundibugyo, which scored 89.4 percent. Mbale was ranked third after scoring 89 percent. Arua District was the worst performer nationwide at 54.3 percent, ranking 146th. Soroti District followed at 57.8 percent, followed by Butebo (58.8), Hoima (60.2) and Bukomansimbi (61.1).

The report comes amid a challenging year for the health sector. Last week, Parliament approved a Shs8.1 trillion supplementary budget, with Shs397 billion earmarked for the health sector. Part of the funds will address gaps in the storage and distribution of additional vaccine supplies expected this financial year, as well as medical supplies handed over to the government by USAID.

On the bright side, the government significantly increased the health budget this financial year, from Shs2.9 trillion to Shs5.8 trillion amid funding gaps after donors withdrew their support.

Also, this week, the governments of Uganda and the US signed a memorandum of understanding on a new health-financing model. The two nations signed a five-year, \$2.3 billion (about Shs8 trillion) bilateral health co-operation agreement that obligates Uganda to share vital health data with the US.

The challenges facing Uganda's health sector have always been known, and it is high time we faced them head-on.

But while releasing the health facility performance rankings, Dr Diana Atwine, the Ministry of Health's permanent secretary, said some of the poor-performing districts were largely struggling with human resource shortages, transparency issues, and inefficiencies.

The challenges facing Uganda's health sector have always been known, and it is high time we faced them head-on.

For a long time, we have grappled with a critical staff shortage. Our doctor-to-patient ratio is still below the World Health Organisation recommended standards. We need to ensure that we train and retain more doctors.

Many of the government hospitals were constructed in the 1960s or even earlier during the colonial era, and were designed for a smaller population than the 46 million people Uganda has now. This has resulted in overcrowding and strain on the hospitals. These facilities need revamping, expansion and furnishing with modern essential equipment.

Finally, the prioritising of the health sector by the government through increased budgets should not be a one-off. This will go a long way in ensuring that we have motivated, well-trained professionals who man functioning health facilities that have all the supplies and medicines they need.

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