

Don't relent in fight against drug theft

In October 2025, the National Drug Authority arrested a military officer and a health worker in a special operation targeting theft of government medicines. The operation uncovered over 150,000 doses of antiretroviral drugs stolen from a military health facility and intended for sale in Jinja City. The officer was a laboratory technician at Kabamba Military Health Centre IV in Mubende.

In another arrest around the same time, an enrolled nurse and officer in charge of Makoole health Centre II in Sembabule was detained for allegedly stealing 3,000 doses of antimalarial and 12,500 malaria testing kits, which she had allegedly moved to a private house for sale.

These are just two of many drug theft cases that plague our healthcare sector every year. While the National Drug Authority does its best to trace and recover these stolen drugs, needless to say, there are many culprits who get away with stealing drugs meant to be given free of charge at health centres, slowly but steadily bleeding the health sector and rendering it unable to meet the healthcare needs of the populace.

The issue:

Drug theft.

Our view:

Clearly, the effort to curb drug theft is not a one-off operation. It must be continuous and multi-pronged.

In September 2025, the government rolled out a nationwide media campaign aimed at ending the theft and diversion of medicines from public health facilities. The campaign was to bring together the Ministry of Health, Uganda Police Force, and State House Health Monitoring Unit and seek to mobilise citizens to protect government-provided medicines, which are meant to be accessed free of charge at all public health facilities.

The National Medical Stores also highlighted that they had, over time, strengthened monitoring and accountability systems, with all delivery trucks being fitted with GPS, tracking devices, and real-time dispatch alerts sent to district officials to confirm receipt of supplies, among other measures.

This week, the Ministry of Health asked Parliament to appropriate at least Shs32.5 billion to enable the government to digitise processes of service provision in state-run health facilities, as a way of plugging gaps through which drugs and medical supplies are stolen.

The request was placed before the House Committee on Budget by the chairperson of the Committee on Health, Mr Joseph Ruyonga, who revealed that Shs32.5 billion is needed for the digitisation of hospital management systems. Clearly, the effort to curb drug theft is not a one-off operation. It must be continuous and multi-pronged.

And while we acknowledge the need to digitise hospital management systems as an additional way to deal with the thefts, we also agree with the demand for a detailed strategy for the planned digitisation, which should be shared before funds are appropriated.

Otherwise, it would not be the first time to see a seemingly good project return underwhelming results, even with the best of intentions. That said, all stakeholders must not relent in the fight against drug theft. Such efforts could be the reason that a life or two are saved at a health centre somewhere in the country.