

Health ministry eases access to all laboratory data

By Violet Nabatanzi

The Government has launched a nationwide integrated electronic request and results dispatch laboratory system, a major health landmark expected to transform how laboratory data is used to guide clinical care, disease surveillance and health policy decisions.

The new system consolidates laboratory data generated from health facilities across the country into a single national repository, allowing authorised users to access real-time information for decision-making at facility, district, regional and national levels.

Paul Mbaka, the assistant commissioner for health information at the Ministry of Health, said the biggest beneficiaries will be surveillance teams monitoring disease patterns, as well as clinicians directly managing patients. For example, the system allows tracking of HIV viral load data to assess how many patients

have achieved viral suppression, a key indicator for treatment success and prevention of transmission.

Mbaka further said the system is fully online and accessible to health managers as long as they have internet connectivity.

"Whether you are a hospital manager, a district health officer, a regional referral hospital administrator, or a manager at the Ministry of Health headquarters, you can access the system and use the data to inform the decisions you have to make," he said.

Using laboratory evidence will enable authorities to identify trends, gaps and possible misuse of diagnostics.

Dr Susan Nabadda, the commissioner for laboratory services, said the move addresses a long-standing challenge of fragmented laboratory data systems, adding that laboratory data has traditionally been stored and accessed in separate systems for HIV, disease surveillance, non-communicable diseases and



Health ministry official Dr Olaro

routine clinical care.

"We have been using this data in silos. If you wanted HIV data, you went to one dashboard. Surveillance data was elsewhere. We have consolidated all these data points into one repository."

"We need to store this data because, first, clinicians can use it for patient monitoring, tracking disease trends and forecasting. For example, when all data is in one database, it becomes

possible to visualise it at once," she said.

"If I observe a high number of malaria cases during a specific period, I can compare that information with the stocks supplied to health facilities. This helps determine whether stocks need to be increased, reduced or redistributed accordingly."

Beyond logistics, the system strengthens advocacy for resources by providing evidence of testing demand and disease burden. Clinicians and laboratory managers can also use the data to improve patient care and monitor disease trends.

Nabadda said the initial rollout has focused on government facilities, although there are plans to expand to private healthcare providers.

Access to the system is restricted to authorised service providers. While the platform is online, users must apply for a username and password and undergo evaluation before being granted access.

The director general of health services, Dr Charles Olaro, said

LAB OFFICERS SPEAK OUT

Moses Kembo, the principal medical lab technologist at Masaka Regional Referral Hospital, said the Laboratory Data Repository has made managing laboratories easier.

"At the click of a button, users will be able to navigate seamlessly across systems that previously operated in isolation. What once required moving from one platform to another, for example, accessing viral load information, will now be handled within a single, integrated system," he said.

"This consolidation will make clinicians' requests for information much easier, while the transmission of results back to the requester will be faster and more efficient."

the repository will also serve as a foundation for research that informs policy.