

Anaka Hospital struggles to deliver services amid woes



Nwoya District leaders, officials from Total Energies, and the hospital staff inspect the commissioned water system at Anaka General Hospital on Monday. PHOTO/TOBBIAS JOLLY OWINY

From a delayed incinerator, long distances for rubbish disposal, an overstretched ambulance, and a broken down water system, Anaka General Hospital is severely constrained.

BY TOBBIAS JOLLY OWINY

Handling medical emergencies and referrals at Anaka General Hospital in Nwoya District could soon turn into a nightmare.

The *Daily Monitor* has established that the current ambulance given by the Health ministry in 2022 is currently overworked and could break down at any moment.

On Monday, Dr Jolly Joe Lapat, the hospital's executive consultant, said in an interview that the hospital, serving key highways (Kampala-Arua and Gulu-Arua) struggles to respond to frequent highway crashes and to handle other medical emergencies throughout the district.

"An ambulance, by policy, is meant to serve a single county, but we currently have two counties, which has a big population and wide geographical area. Moreover, we are the only facility in the district with an ambulance," Dr Lapat said.

He said the current situation has seriously challenged them as the vehicle breaks down sometimes, yet they must reach the scene fast in case of an accident.

"Many times, we fail to respond when emergencies strike at once, because the single ambulance cannot be everywhere, Dr Lapat said.

While the hospital has another ambulance donated in 2015, it broke down three years ago. Though repairable, the hospital currently lacks the resources to fix it.

The best option is to lobby for an ad-

ditional ambulance to boost the services and reduce the stress, he explained.

NICU and maternity ward woos

Both the hospital's neonatal and maternity units also lie in a decrepit state with dilapidated internal systems requiring an urgent upgrade.

"The neonatal intensive care unit is a critical unit of this hospital where all our newborn sick ones are admitted, including those born prematurely. However, it now lies in a terrible state with the beddings, walls, floors, water and toilet systems in a sorry state, Dr Lapat said.

To operate the critical units, including the theatre, maternity, neonatal and the medicine wards, health workers were tasked to fetch four jerricans of water per unit every round of service. On the other hand, patient caretakers are required to deliver two jerricans of water before their patients are catered for.

Intervention

On Monday, district leaders, officials from Total Energies, and the hospital staff commissioned a water facility.

The *Daily Monitor* learnt that the six-month refurbishment project by Engineers without Borders East Africa Ltd, with funding from Total Energies Uganda under its corporate social responsibility component, kicked off last year.

The project involved re-engineering two of the three water sources that served the hospital's main water reservoir, installation of modern pumps and reconnecting the hospital's theatre and neonatal units.

Without disclosing the total cost of the refurbishment project, Michael Muhindo, the Social Projects Engineer at Total Energies, said it involved work on multiple units of the hospital.

"We have rebounded two of the three sources of water to the reservoir and provided them with hybrid pumps that work on both solar and electricity," he said.

On an hourly basis, the pumps can

HOSPITAL WASTE

Anaka General Hospital serves a catchment area comprising five districts: Nwoya, Amuru, Pakwach, Oyam, and Omoro. However, it lacks an incinerator to deal with its waste, which ranges from food and other used medical objects, including gauze, and human body parts. The waste is loaded onto lorries and taken to Nakasongola for incineration.

generate 9,000 litres of water, while the borehole can be pumped for 16 hours a day. With this, the nine hospital wards now have proper running water, sufficient for the hospital to run.

Dr James Okello, the district health officer said the revamped water facilities offer a new lifeline to the facility which has suffered since the system broke down approximately three years.

While pledging the protection and sustainability of the water facility, Dr Okello tasked the district and sub-county authorities to pass by-laws and an ordinance to protect water systems in all the health facilities across the district.

He said Anaka General Hospital's toilet system broke down, blaming this on patients and caretakers, who he said have uncouth toilet habits.

"In the past, some people used maize cobs and even stones for cleaning themselves, which is prohibited. Going on, whoever is admitted or is coming to the hospital should come with toilet paper," he added.

Late last year, the hospital was relieved after the Petroleum Consortium, including the Petroleum Authority of Uganda, UNOC, and TotalEnergies, removed a total of 20 tonnes of hazardous medical waste that had accumulated at the facility for months.

The waste removed and taken to Nakasongola for incineration, had piled up following last year's funding cuts and subsequent withdrawal by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) that left the hospital struggling to manage it.

Whereas the waste problem has been sorted, the construction of an incinerator at the facility recently stalled, after the contractor hired and funded under a USAID project, suspended work after USAID's closure.

Mr Lapat expressed optimism that once the incinerator construction is complete, it will lessen their burden of moving waste to Nakasongola District for incineration. He expressed hope that it will be sorted out this quarter.

Meanwhile, Mr Yusuf Akubonabona, the Nwoya District deputy chief administrative officer, called upon the facility administrators to create a budget to ensure the sustainable management of the refurbished water system.

"Management needs to put aside funds to handle any challenges to avoid such pains from reoccurring," he said.

HOSPITAL NUMBERS

Every quarter, Anaka General Hospital registers approximately 15,000 clients in its outpatient unit and another 3,000 on admission. It is also established that the facility handles an average of 600 deliveries per quarter.