

# Gulu hospital vows action against errant staff amid public outcry

BY JAMES OWICH

**GULU.** Authorities at Gulu Regional Referral Hospital have pledged to take disciplinary action against staff accused of negligence and unprofessional conduct while attending to patients.

The move follows growing complaints from members of the public, who accuse some health workers of using mobile phones while on duty and failing to respond promptly to patients, including those in emergency conditions.

During a hospital *baraza* (hospital community meeting) held at the weekend, several community members raised concerns over what they described as deteriorating standards of care and poor staff attitudes.

Ms Irene Atim, a patient at the facility, called on hospital management to regulate the use of smartphones among

staff, saying it was affecting service delivery.

"Gulu Hospital offers services to many people, but the use of smartphones during working hours should be controlled. You find a nurse busy on a phone instead of attending to a patient," she said.

Despite her concerns, Ms Atim acknowledged that some staff members demonstrate professionalism. She cited a case where her baby, who had sustained a head injury, received prompt and effective care.

"My baby was put on oxygen in the ICU, and the staff there were very professional. They counselled me and saved my child," she added.

In response, the hospital administrator, Mr Walter Oryekwun, said management does not condone the use of phones while on duty and promised to address the issue.

"We do not encourage our staff to use

phones during working hours. We may need to regulate internet access within the hospital to limit use of platforms such as WhatsApp and TikTok while staff are on duty," he said.

Mr Oryekwun revealed that the hospital has installed 164 CCTV cameras, biometric systems and introduced a daily attendance register to curb absentee-

## CHALLENGES

The hospital is also grappling with a severe staffing shortage. According to management, only 378 positions out of the approved 1,273 have been filled, leaving a gap of 835 staff. This represents about 29 percent of the required workforce.

ism, misconduct and corruption.

"As we speak, one staff member has been suspended from receiving salary due to professional misconduct. There is no room for indiscipline and corruption at this hospital," he warned.

Ms Lydia Ayoo, a caretaker at the hospital, also shared her experience, alleging neglect by a nurse who was preoccupied with her phone.

"I brought my child to the hospital with fever and diarrhoea. At the children's ward, I found a nurse busy on her phone and she did not attend to me," Ms Ayoo said. She added that the nurse later instructed her to seek laboratory tests from a private facility.

"I had Shs20,000 and went for a blood test outside. When I returned, she was still not concerned. She only gave me ORS and told me to stay so she could monitor the child," she said.

Patients also allege that they are some-

times asked to pay for services that are supposed to be offered free of charge in government facilities.

Dr Paul Onek Awil, the chairperson of the hospital board, acknowledged the complaints and assured the public that corrective measures would be taken.

"We have taken note of the issues raised. Management will engage staff and address these concerns. We expect to see significant improvements within the next six months," he said.

Dr Jimmy Opigo, representing the Director General of Health Services at the Ministry of Health, urged the public to embrace digital platforms to report cases of misconduct.

"You can use WhatsApp, X and toll-free lines to report misconduct. Suggestion boxes are no longer effective because they are rarely opened. Reporting through digital platforms allows for quicker action," he said.