

Doctors warn sickle cell carriers against having children together

BY STEPHEN OTAGE

KAMPALA. Doctors at Mulago National Referral Hospital have warned couples who are both carriers of the sickle cell gene against having children together, citing the severe pain, suffering and lifelong health complications faced by children born with the disease.

Speaking during a sickle cell awareness walk organised by dfcu Bank yesterday, Dr Rosemary Byanyima, the executive director of Mulago Hospital, said health workers continue to witness the devastating effects of the inherited blood disorder on children and

their families.

"Having a child with a chronic illness is a challenge and seeing your child in pain during a crisis is a problem. Sickle cell is an inherited blood disease, and Uganda has the third highest prevalence of sickle cell in Africa," Dr Byanyima said.

She explained that the Mulago Sickle Cell Clinic, which was established in 1962, receives between 60 and 100 patients daily.

According to Dr Byanyima, patients with sickle cell disease frequently require blood transfusions because of their weakened immunity and vulnerability to infections.

"In worst cases, children have died in

our hands due to lack of blood to infuse into them," she said, adding that the hospital is seeking more partners to help expand the clinic and improve patient facilities to accommodate the growing number of cases.

Dr Phillip Kasirye, a paediatric sickle cell consultant at Mulago, described sickle cell disease as one of the world's most common inherited genetic disorders and urged people to test and know their sickle cell status before

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CASES HANDLED
AT MULAGO
DAILY

starting families.

He noted that the challenge is not unique to Uganda but affects many countries globally.

The awareness walk, organised jointly by dfcu Bank and Mulago hospital staff, saw participants traverse areas including Nakasero, Kamwokya and Wandegaya in Kampala.

Ms Helena Mayanja, the head of corporate affairs and sustainability at dfcu Bank, said the initiative was inspired by a visit to the Mulago Sickle Cell Clinic in 2024 during the bank's 60th anniversary activities.

"We visited Mulago hospital to per-

form an act of kindness, to create awareness about sickle cell and we learnt many things. My own family has this issue. It is silent and secretive, and yet there are ways to manage it by testing to know whether you are a carrier," she said.

Ms Margaret Karume, the executive director of dfcu Bank, said the bank was mobilising other institutions to raise funds to improve facilities at the sickle cell clinic, particularly in areas of sanitation and patient comfort.

She said the bank has lined up more activities aimed at raising public awareness about sickle cell disease and encouraging early testing and screening.