

By Ritah Mukasa

The 25 years journey of National Medical Stores (NMS) has been successful being decorated with great milestones. However, according to Moses Kamabare, general manager of the Government-owned organisation, they have faced challenges along the way as discussed below.

Poor quantification of needs

There has been continuous poor quantification of drug needs and non-adherence to procurement plans during ordering by high level health facilities.

For the lower health facilities, Kamabare says the biggest challenge is the elastic nature of upgrading of facilities.

"To curb this challenge, the health ministry has advised districts not to construct new or upgrade facilities without co-ordinating with them for better service delivery," he says. He adds that there is also need to align cycle orders with procurements plans for the high level health facilities.

Funding gaps

Kamabare says there are funding gaps for key drugs like ARVs. The stakeholders and funders do not cover 100% of the need. ARVs purchase is funded by the Government of Uganda, Global Fund and PEPFAR. Presently, the public sector is catering for 65% of the patients facing funding gaps.

"There is need for increased funding for ARVs, test kits and laboratory supplies," he emphasizes.

Kamabare adds that overall, the funds NMS receives from the Government are not enough to cater for the needs of all Ugandans.

For example, last financial year NMS received sh250b, but when you look at the value of the medicine that went through NMS to the individual facilities, it was actually more than sh900b.

"Therefore, the difference is the value of medicine and medical supplies that we get from development partners. We must do well because our partners may lose confidence in our system and withhold the supplies that they give us," Kamabare says.

He adds that Uganda's tax base has not been able to support the rapid growth of the population and the funds received directly from the Government have not been enough to take care of all the needs. That is why the Government has decided to run to development partners to bridge the gap between what is needed and what the Government can give. In case the tax base improves, the Government will be in position to take care of its people.

Poor prescription of drugs

Kamabare cites poor prescription of medicines, as one of the major challenges causing artificial shortage of drugs at health facilities.

This is because many of the health centres do not have pharmacists. Prescriptions and dispensing of medicines is done by nurses and other health workers.

"They do not know how to prescribe and dispense medicine. The health workers end up giving more drugs to patients than what would actually heal their illness. This leads to shortages," he expounds.

Kamabare says errant health workers should be charged for disciplinary offenses such as

How NMS has overcome challenges over the years



NMS Smart Care helps to ensure that public health facilities get the drug supplies on time

THE DURING THE PAST YEARS, MEDICINES WOULD EXPIRE AT DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS DUE TO LACK OF LOGISTICAL SUPPORT TO DELIVER IT. WE THEN STARTED DELIVERING TO EACH HEALTH CENTRE, BUT AGAIN WE WOULD FIND EXPIRED DRUGS WHICH WERE NOT GIVEN OUT BECAUSE THERE WAS NO PHARMACIST

prescribing medicines outside the standard clinical guidelines.

Theft of essential drugs

There is of essential medicines and medical supplies are meant to be given free of charge to patients in government health facilities.

This is mostly done by health workers, who sell or stock the drugs in their pharmacies. After prescribing to the patients, they refer them to their pharmacies to buy the drugs.

However, Kamabare says embossment of all drugs has helped to ensure that patients can easily distinguish public medicines and medical supplies.

Embossment is putting special distinguishing marks on any product or supply and in the case of NMS

they have words 'Government of Uganda Not for sale'.

"This has reduced the level of theft of the drugs and corruption, where some health workers would demand payment for such supplies.

NMS is also engaging the public

and civil society organisations to address this challenge. He advises that in case a person finds such drugs being sold in or outside of the hospital, one should not pay for them, but also report instances to the nearest authorities such as the Police.

Expiry of medicines

Kamabare stresses that expiry of medicine is partly due to absence of pharmacists in health centres, who are supposed to be dispensing medicines to patients.

"During past years, medicines would expire at district headquarters due to lack of logistical support to deliver it. We then started delivering to each health centre, but again we would find expired drugs which were not given out because there was no pharmacist," Kamabare reveals.

In addition to that, he says, NMS has also been accused of delayed drug deliveries resulting into shortages in some public health facilities. The delays often arise from poor management of respective public health facilities which do not submit orders on time.

Kamabare appeals to the public to work hand-in-hand with health workers to make sure that NMS gets exactly what is on ground so that they can release for them the right drugs required for their patients.

"There has been a challenge of health workers asking for drugs which are not needed by the patients. We, therefore, advise them to work with us," he appeals.

Limited storage space

The increased demand for NMS services and Uganda being a landlocked country calls for planning

for increased storage at the centre.

The NMS boss says there is need for a facility with three times the current storage capacity in order to be comfortable with the new mandate.

Kamabare acknowledges existence of the new warehouse in Kajjansi, which he anticipates to be in use by June 2019.

Neglect of prevention in healthcare

There is a need for a healthy balance between people's rights and their responsibilities in achieving good health.

According to the NMS boss, more than 75% of all diseases in Uganda are preventable, but its unfortunate that they cannot be prevented.

He advises the public to consume safe drinking water, wear helmets and safety belts, condom use, family planning, eating healthy, while exercising. Kamabare also advocates mosquito net use, prevention of crime, avoidance of drink driving and to have by laws on latrines and stray dogs.

Expectations of NMS from the public on service delivery

Every community member should be directly responsible in ensuring that the medicines reach the end user safely and on time. Therefore, NMS expects the communities to appoint a representatives to be part of the receiving team when medicines are being delivered and checked.

The representatives should monitor whether deliveries are made according to the NMS published delivery schedule.

In the same way, the communities is also expected to protect medicines against theft from the health facility.