Makerere University records fewer PhDs

By Cecilia Okoth

Persons living with HIV/AIDS should be screened for alcohol consumption in order to manage cases where there is a risk of addiction.

The use of alcohol, according to Dr Bonnie Wandera, a researcher at Makerere University, affects one’s adherence to antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) that are meant to boost their immunity.

Wandera, who has been studying at the college of business and management sciences, is among the 56 set to receive a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree at Makerere University’s 69th week long graduation ceremony, starting today.

Wandera’s study

In his synopsis, Wandera assesses alcohol consumption and alcohol reduction interventions among HIV-infected persons in a large urban HIV clinic in Uganda.

He found that People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV) who consume alcohol were more likely to practise unprotected sexual intercourse, engage with multiple sexual partners, non-disclosure of HIV status to sexual partners, as well as have lower adherence to ARVs.

The study highlights the need to screen and manage alcohol use in PLHIV with poor ARVs adherence, using interventions of more than a single alcohol counselling session.

 Asked about the findings, Dr Joshua Musinguzi, the AIDS Control Programme manager at the health ministry, said: “Consumption of alcohol has been associated with risk-taking behaviour, because it inhibits individual judgment, which is likely to lead to HIV transmission.”

“Even if you are going to drink alcohol, you will either forget to take your drugs or postpone taking them. Your nutrition will also decline,” Musinguzi said.

“Whether HIV-positive or not, everybody should stay away from alcohol, because it may put you in harm’s way.” he added.

PhD programmes on average cost between sh8m and sh15m annually

Fewer PhDs

The number of PhD graduates has, however, declined by 23 from 79 last year. In 2017, the university graduated 77 PhDs.

University Vice Chancellor, Prof. Barnabas Nawangwe, attributed the reduction to the fact that most PhD students are under programmes funded or supported by donors like Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), which experience funding fluctuations.

Wandera’s study was funded by the Wellcome Trust through Training Health Researchers in Vocational Excellence in East Africa (THRiVE) Consortium and was supervised by Dr Nazarius Tumwesigye, Dr David Mafgiri and Dr Ajay Sethi.

“These students are part of the last batch of the first funding phase. However, we expect to see more PhD students graduate next year,” he said.

However, Dr Alex Mugisha, the acting executive director of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), said getting an average of 50 PhD students is actually a remarkable progress. Mugisha said unlike undergraduate programmes, most PhD students study at their own pace and that the rate of completion depends on enrolment input.

“Nevertheless, we expect that when it comes to producing PhD students,” Phds, according to Mugisha, help in creation of knowledge, innovations, jobs, human resource and subsequently development.

On funding, Mugisha said the matter was discussed at the education ministry’s sector review and that plans were underway to improve funding for PhD students.

A PhD programme on average costs between sh8m and sh15m annually. It usually takes between three and five years.