

Last year's first graduation saw Busitema University pass out 47 medical doctors



Prof. Waako (left) receiving the instruments from power by Prof. Okwakol. Photo by George Bitu

Busitema University gets new vice-chancellor

By George Bitu

Yesterday morning, the vice-chancellor of Busitema University Prof. Mary Okwakol handed over the instruments of power to a new leader, as she heads for retirement.

Over the last decade, Okwakol has been at the centre of turning around the fortunes of the university. The institution is located on the main Jinja-Tororo highway in Busia district.

The occasion, graced by the university council members and staff, was characterised by speeches that heaped praises on Okwakol for a job done well.

Farewell

Prof. Paul Waako thanked her predecessor for running her lap well.

"I am not coming in from a point of I know-it-all, but rather with an I-know-nothing approach. Our goal is to work together to facilitate learning," Waako said.

He added that learning was a continuous process necessitating to call on the advice of co-workers as well as his predecessor.

Achievements

Gideon Obbo, the university council chairperson hailed Okwakol for her efforts in transforming Busitema University into the prosperous public institution it is.

"In 2006, when she took on the venture, the area was a wasteland. The campus had dilapidated buildings and lacked any semblance of university," Obbo recalls.

Okwakol revealed that she was selected back then, to head a team that kick-started a public university at Busitema within a timeframe of three years.

"By February 2007, the National Council for Higher Education was accrediting our programmes, as well giving us a charter," she says.

Waako's deeds

Prof. Waako said when he joined Busitema, he started from scratch.

"The faculty of medicine had no student. I was the founder dean," he recounts.

Obbo added that from zero in 2013, the medical school, operating at Mbale Regional Referral Hospital now has 461 students.

"The university medical school has

over the last six years become the pride of eastern Uganda. During the first graduation on October 3, last year, we passed out 47 medical doctors," he said.

Waako added that another 55 final year medical students were due for graduation this October to bring the total number of medical doctors to 102.

Waako disclosed that over the last six years, the School of Health Sciences has developed six programmes, three of which are at undergraduate, with the rest at masters' level.

WHO IS WAAKO?

- 1981: Obtained a Primary Leaving Examination certificate from Bute Primary School, Mayuge district
- 1984: Acquired a Uganda Certificate of Education certificate at Jinja SSS
- 1988: Attained a Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education certificate from Jinja Senior Secondary School
- 1994: Graduated from Makerere University with a bachelor's of medicine and surgery.
- 1995: Worked for six months as medical doctor at Iganga hospital.
- 1995: Served as teaching assistant at Makerere University medical school.
- 2012: Became a professor of pharmacology and head of pharmacology department at Makerere University
- Shifted to Busitema University to start the varsity teaching hospital

Community engagement

Obbo appreciates the move to be community-oriented when it comes to activities of the school of health.

"There are 19 other teaching platforms of Busitema University medical school in eastern Uganda. These are spread out in the community to benefit residents," Obbo said.

He said medical students spend at least three months in practical community-based education training, which is he described as a God-send to the residents.

Waako identifies such sites as two based in Karamoja, three others at Bukwo; Kapchorwa and Sipi in Sebei region, Kidera in Busoga region, Kibuku in Bukedi region, plus another in the Teso region.

"It is a two-way helpful process. As medical students learn, the residents are helped to get treatment," he observes.

Plans

Waako believes his tenure at the helm of Busitema University would be a time for the learner to be at the centre of emphasis.

"The students is the major reason we are here. Therefore, we need to keep them at the forefront in the struggle to make Busitema a better varsity," Waako says.

He argues that the future of this country in technological advancement which makes science-biased universities, like Busitema to be more relevant.

WAAKO'S WEALTH OF EXPERIENCE

Prof. Paul Waako is the new vice-chancellor of Busitema University. He was born on February 21, 1967 at Mukuta, Mayuge district.

He holds a PhD in clinical pharmacology from the University of Cape Town, South Africa, an MSc (pharmacology) and MBChB degree from Makerere University.

He also holds a postgraduate diploma in management from the Uganda Management Institute. He is married to Eng. Ziria Tibalwa Waako and they have five children.

Prof. Waako brings 24 years of professional experience to Busitema University.

He was first appointed assistant lecturer in pharmacology and therapeutics at Makerere University in March 1995 and rose through academic ranks to professor of pharmacology and therapeutics in 2012.

He has served as chairperson of the department of pharmacology and therapeutics at Makerere University for 10 years, co-ordinator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), supported East African Regional Technical Resource Centre for training and research on pharmaceuticals and founder dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences, Busitema University for five years.

He has attended many international courses, including pedagogy in pharmacotherapy at the University Groningen, in the Netherlands and promotion of rational drug use at the University of Dar es salaam. Others are biomedical research training in collaboration with the City College of the City University of New York; contemporary approaches to drug discovery and development at the University of Cape Town, South Africa and scientific writing at the University of Alabama, Birmingham, the US. Others courses include monitoring and evaluation of HIV/AIDS programmes at the Curtin University in Perth, Australia; validation of online training programmes at the University of Dar es salaam, Tanzania and policy analysis for health innovations and health systems at African Centre for Technology Studies, Nairobi, Kenya.

In his academic tour Prof. Waako's has served as a member of the seven-man World Health Organisation - International Union of Basic and Clinical pharmacology joint task force for developing clinical pharmacology in Africa; member of the task force for the establishment of Kabale University Medical School and has been an external examiner at Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Mbarara Uganda, Walter Sisulu University, South Africa, University of Bergen, Norway, the Aga Khan University, Uganda, Moi University, Eldoret Kenya; University of Nairobi, Kenya; Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences, Dar es salaam, Tanzania and University of Cape Town, South Africa

Prof. Waako has served on several national and international technical committees, including Pharmacovigilance committee of the National Drug Authority, traditional and complementary medicines committees of the National drug Authority, the Uganda Medicines Control Authority Bill drafting committee and National Task Force for Policy Formulation on Traditional and Complementary Medicines. Other committees are the Ministry of Health Taskforce for the development of a new health promotion policy for Uganda and the East, Central and Southern African Health Community (ECSA) working group on human resources for health.

He has managed over 10 international collaborative research projects, focusing on strengthening pharmaceutical systems and traditional medicines.

He has published extensively in the areas of traditional medicines, drug discovery and development, rational use of medicines and medicine supply systems with over 50 publications in peer reviewed journals.

He is the co-Author of the book entitled: *Plant-medicinal Dictionary for East Africa*. He has supervised over 10 PhD research projects and a number of master's projects.

He has served as consultant to several USAID-supported programmes.

He is a reviewer of many international journals, a senior research fellow at Queen Mary University London and a fellow of the Uganda National Academy of Sciences.