

## Quality of Medical Interns still wanting, says minister

By Henry Sekanjako  
and Mary Karugaba

The health ministry has called for an overhaul of the medical internship policy, saying the quality of some medical interns is still wanting.

The health minister, Dr Jane Ruth Aceng, says the ministry has drafted a new internship policy, which has been submitted before cabinet for approval, to boost the quality of medical interns.

Briefing Parliament about the current standoff between the medical interns and the health ministry last week, Aceng told the legislators that some medical interns cannot carry out surgery, despite spending over five years at the medical schools.

She said: "The product that we are getting is not of the required quality."

Aceng, however, attributed the poor quality of the interns to few training centres and limited number of specialists.

Recently, the medical interns protested the rotational internship programme, saying the three months rotation is short, and does not give the interns adequate exposure to learn the practical skills in each of the four disciplines; internal medicine, surgery, obstetrics and gynecology and paediatrics.

According to the ministry, previously, the rotation for medical interns used to be six months in one surgical discipline and six months in one medical discipline for the one year of internship.

However, according to Dr Charles Olaro, the director of curative services at the health ministry, that was in 2009 temporarily changed to three months rotation in each of the four disciplines as a trial, with the assumption that obtaining skills in all the disciplines would enable medical doctors to work in health centres IV with confidence.

The legislators said the training should be changed to enable medical students acquire skills during their time of study.

"When you say there are people who after graduating cannot conduct surgery, really how do they graduate?" Kadaga asked.

In response, Aceng explained that Uganda's training focuses more on the theoretical bit, where students only go practical during the internship.

She said: "The internship programme is where you learn the practical. In the medical school we learn the theory. When you go to learn the practical skills under the specialists, that is where you are taught how to operate," Aceng explained, to the disbelief of the MPs.

On the issue of remuneration of medical interns, Aceng noted that the ministry was constrained by resources, which she said were only increased during the current financial year.

"The current allowance paid to a medical intern, is what is available in the medium term expenditure framework for the ministry, taking into consideration a high number of medical interns," she said.

She noted that each medical intern is paid sh940,000 as allowance to cater for meals, allowance and accommodation.