

‘Community care is better for treating mental cases’

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Patients and nurses at Butabika Hospital (File photo)

KAMPALA - Experts in mental health have called on the government to invest in community care as opposed to institutions for mental health interventions.

And the argument is, according to Derrick Kiiza Mbuga, that people suffering from mental conditions deserve to be treated amongst people they are familiar with.

Mbuga is the executive director of Mental Health Uganda, a group that brings together people with mental illness to enhance mental health service provision.

Speaking at the launch of 16 days of mental health activism in Kampala, Mbuga said the familiarity not only helps mental sufferers to cope, but also helps the community to understand that mental illness is treatable.

The campaign on mental health is a run-up to the World Mental Health Day slated for October 10. The two weeks of activism was an idea and organized by John Paul 11 Justice and Peace Centre in collaboration with Makerere University Art Gallery.

'I was beaten thoroughly'

The worry is that most regional referral hospitals are not well-equipped to handle mental cases well which reportedly leads to some patients coming out more disturbed than before.

“Butabika is the only hospital that offers three meals a day for patients but even then the bed capacity currently stands at 550 for a population of about 700 patients,” said Mbuga.

“This implies one thing – congestion, hence increased levels of stress for patients.”



The alcohol and drug unit at Butabika Hospital being officially opened in 2006

Joseph Atugunda, the founder of Heart Sounds, an initiative that engages victims of mental illness, shared his grueling experience as a patient suffering from a mental condition known as Bi-polar (where an individual experiences extremes of depressions at one moment and excitement at another) since 1989.

“I was taken to a traditional healer who beat me up thoroughly in the guise of beating the evil spirit from me. He even made painful cuttings in my head saying that he was putting a concoction that would restore me to sanity.”

Meanwhile, Professor Peter Baguma, the dean of Makerere University's School of Psychology, explained that psychology and mental health is one of the disregarded fields of study with many people thinking it is not relevant to national development.

"Few people are interested in professionalizing in this field, which leaves the country with very limited human resource to handle the emerging cases," he said.

The 16 days of activism started with a photo exhibition under the theme 'Condemned' showcasing the different scenarios of abuse of mental health victims – many chained away for years and others locked up in secluded areas.

The photos were taken by award winning Paris-based photojournalist Robin Hammond, from the war ravaged countries in sub Saharan Africa including Eastern Congo, South Sudan, Mogadishu, northern Uganda and Liberia.

Mental health in Uganda is reportedly one of the disregarded conditions that has seen limited resources committed to this effect and society left to consider it more mythical than real.

For more information check on: <http://www.newvision.co.ug/news/660201--community-care-is-better-for-treating-mental-cases.html>