

Uganda: Going hungry in hospital

Studio cue

Decent food is vital to aid recovery from TB. For four years Uganda's Mulago Hospital benefited from its participation on a World Food Programme initiative that ensured TB patients enjoyed regular meals, a well-balanced diet and food supplements. But support from this scheme has ended and as **Collins Vumiria** reports from Kampala, there are tough times ahead for TB patients.

Script

Sfx: hospital noises

Collins Vumiria: Mulago National Treatment Centre is the main national hospital of Uganda and it is supplemented by 11 regional referral hospitals that are dotted all over the country. Patients flock here in anticipation of better drugs and better feeding with the hope that they will go back home fully recovered.

Sfx: hospital staff

Collins Vumiria: Nutritional support has also become a key factor for improved survival rates on the hospital's tuberculosis wards. TB patients had been part of a nutrition supplementation scheme supported by the World Food Programme. But the money from that four-year initiative has almost run out. In addition, this flagship hospital has been bogged down recently by problems in the kitchens, all of which are causing great concern on the tuberculosis wards.

Sfx: patients and Zainab speaking

Collins Vumiria: Eighteen-year-old Zainab is a young girl who came from Kisumu in Kenya and she came to work as a housemaid. But three years ago she was diagnosed with tuberculosis and therefore she could not work any longer.

Zainab speaks

She's here on the TB ward unattended to but luckily whenever food comes once in a while the nurses or even attendants of other patients give her the food.

Zainab speaks

Collins translates: Zainab is saying that she has the appetite to eat but problem is that she never gets the food to eat or at times it doesn't even come on time.

Collins Vumiria: Phillip Gesasira is the man from the kitchen who is here to serve the patients on the TB ward. And he says the reason as to why the food has delayed is because they did not have power and now he says tomorrow most likely they will not supply the food because they will not have cooked since they won't have steam.

But the picture has not always been so bleak. Until recently TB patients involved in with World Food Programme initiative could be assured of three meals a day. Patients would be served with white maize or soya bean porridge for breakfast, maize meal with beans or peas for lunch and boiled bananas or sweet potatoes with peas or beans for dinner. Most of the foods served under the World Food Programme arrangement were usually fortified with rich food nutrients - this is not the same anymore.

Dr Alphonse Okwera: My name is Dr Alphonso Okwera . I am the director of the TB centre based in Mulago Hospital.

Collins Vumiria: Dr Alphonse Okwera together with a team of researchers work to provide food supplements for the TB patients on the wards. Health professionals have noted for a long time now that food assistance along with the drug compliance is essential if there is to be any headway in the struggle against tuberculosis.

Dr Alphonse Okwera: On average each patient would gain about 15kgs through the course of treatment and they responded very well to the treatment the rate of recovery was also faster. Also, adherence to treatment was 100 per cent so food supplementation should be part and parcel of patients' care in hospital.

Collins Vumiria: This project has been running since 2002-2006 and sounds like it has closed.

Dr Alphonse Okwera: Yeah this has left us in a very big dilemma because the World Food Programme say we cannot sustain it, there are other people who are more needy than ourselves in this part of the world.

Collins Vumira: Looks like the future is gloomy in as far as nutrition for TB patients is concerned.

Dr Alphonse Okwera: These patients are needy. These patients need help. Control of TB also controls transmission to communities, there's no boundary where TB cannot reach. I believe that we should look forward to corporate organisations that appreciate our problem and we are looking forward to the hospital administration putting forward their budget and being supported by the government so that our patients continue feeding well.

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