

Uganda's Public-Private Partnerships in Health Meeting



On February 7th, 2024, the Ministry of Health hosted a significant event—the Public-Private Partnerships in Health (PPPH) Technical Working Group (TWG) meeting. This gathering, held in collaboration with the Uganda Healthcare Federation (UHF) and supported by the USAID/Uganda Health Systems Strengthening Activity, brought together 80 key health sector participants at the Protea Hotel in Kampala.

The objective of this meeting was to deliberate on the critical role of public-private partnerships in achieving sustainable healthcare outcomes. Among the attendees were Ministry of Health leaders, regulatory council heads, healthcare professionals, advocates, and development partners.

Here are the highlights from the presentations:

Dr. Tom Aliti, Commissioner of Health Services with the Ministry of Health gave opening remarks and took the opportunity to set the pace for the meeting highlighting numerous key policy issues:

Dr. Aliti emphasized the vital role of Public-Private Partnership in Health (PPPH) desk officers. These officers play a crucial role in facilitating service delivery and data collection at the regional level. He stressed the need for comprehensive collaboration to effectively address healthcare challenges.

Dr. Aliti proposed that the UHF take the lead in countering negative publicity related to cost issues and service delivery quality. He also highlighted the operational challenges faced by private health facilities, emphasizing the importance of stakeholder engagement and capacity building.

He mentioned that key policy clarification areas requiring attention included telemedicine, community health insurance, and the implementation of new laws on narcotic drugs.

MEDICAL COUNCIL UPDATE.

Dr. Ivan Kisuule, the Acting Registrar of the Uganda Medical and Dental Practitioners Council, provided a comprehensive update on recent developments and initiatives undertaken by the regulatory councils. Here are the key points from his presentation:

Merger of Regulatory Entities:

Dr. Kisuule outlined the plans for the merger of regulatory entities within the healthcare sector, with a specific focus on allied health and nursing fields. The objective behind this merger is to enhance efficiency and ensure better alignment of regulatory functions.

While acknowledging concerns raised about the merger, Dr. Kisuule emphasized the collaborative efforts with the Ministry of Health (MOH) to address these issues. The implementation of the merger is awaiting further guidelines from parliament and is slated for 2024.

Joint Inspections and Compliance

Dr. Kisuule discussed the importance of joint inspections and regulations to ensure that healthcare facilities comply with established standards. He expressed concerns about illegal operations in private facilities and stressed the need for adherence to professional standards. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) was highlighted as a crucial aspect of maintaining high-quality healthcare services.

Safe Quality Improvement System (SQIS):

Dr. Kisuule encouraged private facilities to utilize the Safe Quality Improvement System (SQIS) for self-assessment. He elaborated that SQIS provides a structured approach for facilities to assess their practices, identify areas for improvement, and enhance overall quality.

Fee Guidelines for Private Sector Services:

He mentioned there are ongoing discussions revolving around proposed fee guidelines for services in the private sector. Some doctors have expressed concerns over pricing autonomy, and these discussions aim to strike a balance between affordability and sustainability.



GLOBAL FUND GRANT

Dr. Mugerwa Robert, representing the Ministry of Health, provided valuable insights on the private sector's role in the Global Fund GC7 Grant. Here are the key points from his presentation:

Grant Focus:

The Global Fund GC7 Grant is strategically aimed at addressing identified healthcare gaps. These gaps are to be tackled through strategic partnerships that align with national health objectives.

Allocation and Targets:

With the Ministry of Health and TASO serving as the principle recipients, an allocation of \$18.7 million has been designated.

This funding primarily targets private facilities and focuses on three critical areas:

- Commodity procurement: Ensuring a steady supply of essential medical supplies.
- Capacity building: Enhancing the skills and capabilities of healthcare professionals.
- Support activities: Bolstering overall healthcare infrastructure.



Implementation Channels:

Dr. Mugerwa outlined the implementation channels for effective execution:

- Councils: Collaborating with local governing bodies.
- Associations: Engaging professional healthcare associations.
- Private Village Health Teams: Leveraging community-based teams.
- Uganda Healthcare Federation: Involving private sector entities.
- Non-health-focused organizations: Partnering beyond the healthcare realm.

District-Level Oversight:

District Health Officers play a crucial role in overseeing implementation at the local level. Their focus is on strengthening private-sector reporting, contributing to the overall health system resilience.

SERVICE DELIVERY AT KAWEMPE HOSPITAL:

Dr. Najjemba Amina, representing the Local Maternity and Neonatal System Coordination Committee, provided a comprehensive overview of initiatives aimed at enhancing maternal and child health services. Here are the key points from her presentation:

- Augmentation of staffing levels: Ensuring adequate personnel to meet healthcare demands.
- Skill development among health workers: Enhancing their capabilities.
- Establishment of mentorship programs: Fostering professional growth.

Collaboration and Knowledge-Sharing:

The LMNS coordination team emphasizes collaboration and knowledge-sharing. They facilitate platforms for districts and regions to exchange best practices in maternal and neonatal care. This collaborative approach ensures that valuable insights and effective strategies are disseminated widely.

Data Utilization and Communication Enhancement:

Initiatives focus on leveraging data for informed decision-making. Inter-facility communication is improved to streamline processes and enhance patient care. Infrastructure enhancement plays a crucial role in supporting efficient healthcare delivery.

Community Engagement and Regional Coordination:

The framework follows a regional hub and spoke model. This model aims to enhance coordination and address service provision gaps effectively. Community engagement ensures that local needs are considered and met.

Baby-Friendly Health Facility Initiative(BFHI):

Ms. Barbara Nalubanga, a prominent breastfeeding advocate, delivered an insightful presentation on the implementation of the BFHI. Here are the key points from her presentation:

Importance of Supportive Policies and Healthcare Workers:

Ms. Nalubanga emphasized the vital role of healthcare workers in facilitating breastfeeding initiation. She underscored the manifold benefits of breastfeeding for both mothers and infants, including protection against health issues and enhanced cognitive development. Supportive policies play a crucial role in promoting successful breastfeeding practices.





The BFHI Process:

Ms. Nalubanga outlined the BFHI process, which includes:

- Self-appraisal: Facilities assess their practices and identify areas for improvement.
- Training: Healthcare staff receive specialized training to enhance their skills.
- Performance evaluation: Regular assessments ensure adherence to BFHI guidelines.

Notable Achievements:

Several facilities have been recognized as exemplary baby-friendly facilities:

- Kawempe Hospital
- Kiganda Maternity Clinic
- St. Stephen's Hospital

Key Lessons Learned:

Teamwork and leadership are critical for successful BFHI implementation.

E-learning platforms provide valuable resources for ongoing capacity building among healthcare workers.

Ensuring the success of breastfeeding promotion initiatives in private health facilities requires continuous effort and commitment.

Bridging Gaps: Uganda Healthcare Federation and Kiruddu National Referral Hospital Collaborate for Better Healthcare.

The Uganda Healthcare Federation (UHF) plays a pivotal role in Uganda's health sector. With a strong focus on affordable and accessible quality healthcare, UHF collaborates with partners to enhance medical care delivery across private health facilities. It's worth noting that 98% of the over 2,200 facilities in Kampala are privately owned, while the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) manages only eight facilities. This stark disparity underscores the critical role of private providers in healthcare service delivery.

In February 2024, UHF took a significant step by partnering with Kiruddu National Referral Hospital to organize two online Continuing Medical Education (CME) sessions. These sessions aimed to bridge the gap between public and private health facilities by virtually including private health workers. A total of 178 health workers from 145 private health facilities actively participated in these sessions, marking a collaborative effort to improve healthcare services.



Key Challenges to Tackle:

1. Referral Patterns: One of the critical challenges identified was the poor management of patients prior to referral. The referral experience in Kampala's higher-level facilities highlighted the need to enhance patient management within private facilities before referring them to higher-level institutions like Kawempe National Referral Hospital (KNRH).

2. Referral Quality:

Underreporting: Healthcare facilities in Kampala exhibit a low reporting rate (64%) into the routine health information system, compared to the national average of 85%. This underreporting significantly impacts the accuracy of referral data.

Complex Network: Kampala's intricate network of public and private facilities often results in disjointed and inefficient referral processes. Patients may not always reach the most appropriate level of care promptly.

A Vision for Improved Healthcare:

The collaboration between UHF and Kiruddu National Referral Hospital holds immense promise. By addressing these critical issues, we envision a healthcare system where patients receive timely and effective care, regardless of whether they seek treatment in public or private facilities. As we celebrate this partnership, let us continue working together to build a healthier and more resilient Uganda.

Join us for the next online CME scheduled to take place on 15th and 21st March, on the topic Infection Prevention and Control. This session will empower private facility health workers to enhance patient safety, combat antibiotic resistance, and stay resilient in the face of evolving healthcare challenges.

Exploring the Benefits of Pooled Procurement : Mechanisms in Private Sector Health Supply Chains in Uganda

The Private Sector Supply Chain Platform, a collaborative initiative between the Uganda Healthcare Federation (UHF) and the USAID-funded Strengthening Supply Chain Systems (SSCS) Activity, serves as a dynamic forum for private sector stakeholders to explore synergies and enhance collaboration in strengthening Uganda's Health Supply Chain system. Through this platform, transformative change is envisioned, aiming for a more resilient, effective, integrated and enhanced collaboration between private and public health supply chains and its stakeholders.

To further strengthen this collaboration, UHF partnered with the SSCS Activity to convene various 60 stakeholders in the private sector in the 5th private sector supply chain forum aimed at exploring the concept of pooled procurement mechanisms as an approach to improve affordability and access to health commodities.

During the meeting held on February 27, 2024, in Kampala, Uganda, participants appreciated the concept of pooled procurement among private health providers, highlighting its potential to enhance efficiency, reduce costs, and ensure a steady supply of essential medicines and health supplies. Pooled procurement involves combining financial and non-financial resources to create a single entity for purchasing health products.

Dr. Denis Okidi, the Director of Supply Chain at MSH/SSCS Activity, elaborated on the benefits of pooled procurement, explaining various models from informed buying to central contracting and purchasing. These models offer diverse approaches to optimize procurement processes and maximize cost-effectiveness.

Dr. Tom Aliti, Commissioner of Health Services (Health Sector Partners and Multi-Sectoral Coordination) at the Ministry of Health, emphasized the importance of a unified approach, highlighting the private sector's predominant role in the healthcare supply chain. He stressed the necessity of inclusive representation and streamlined regulations to bolster the supply chain's efficiency. He said, "To enhance coordination, governance, personnel, and capacity building within health supply chain systems and to ensure acknowledgment of the private sector's contribution, collaboration between the public and private sectors is imperative."

Moving forward, the focus is on developing a comprehensive plan towards a pooled procurement mechanism for the private sector, to be discussed and approved in the Public Private Partnership for Health (PPPH) Technical Working Group at the Ministry of Health. This plan aims to improve productivity, regulation, respect, and trust among health supply chain players, and increase visibility in the private sector. Through concerted efforts and strategic partnerships, the private sector's pivotal role in advancing healthcare delivery in Uganda can be further amplified, ultimately benefiting the entire population.

