

Eliminating Quacks and Improving Health Care in Uganda

Carol Bales, IntraHealth International



Dr. Katumba (Photo courtesy of Uganda Capacity Program)

“What I like best out of my job,” declares Dr. Ssentongo Katumba, “is to see that I leave this place better than I found it, in terms of providing quality [care] to my people in Uganda.”

Dr. Katumba is the registrar of the Uganda Medical and Dental Practitioners Council. The council aims to protect the health of Ugandans by requiring doctors and dentists to register and obtain an annual practicing license.

Unfortunately, many of these health workers have not properly registered or do not hold a valid license. Worse, “quacks” pose as medical practitioners, offering services without the appropriate training.

These practices can result in the delivery of poor-quality – and often harmful – care. That’s why Dr. Katumba and the council teamed up with the [Uganda Capacity Program](#), a USAID-funded project led by [IntraHealth International](#).

“I couldn’t answer all the queries in time”

The council receives daily requests to confirm health workers’ credentials, as well as complaints from patients – some about being conned or harmed by quacks. “I couldn’t answer all the queries in time,” admits Dr. Katumba.

The council used a paper-based system to manage its information. Finding one doctor’s or dentist’s file among thousands was extremely time-consuming. Compiling information into reports requested by the Ministry of Health, for instance, was nearly impossible.

The council decided to implement [iHRIS Qualify](#), open source software that captures registration and licensing information. The Uganda Capacity Program customized it for the council’s specific needs. iHRIS Qualify is part of the [iHRIS](#) platform of health workforce software. [CapacityPlus](#) develops and releases updates for the iHRIS products, and assists the Uganda Capacity Program to improve data quality and use.

“We shall do away with all these clinics where people calling themselves health workers have been causing injuries and death.”



A rural health facility in Uganda (Photo by Trevor Snapp/ courtesy of IntraHealth International)



Nobert Mijumbi (right), developer for Uganda Capacity Program, explains iHRIS (Photo by Trevor Snapp/courtesy of IntraHealth)

Instead of sifting through stacks of paper, the council now uses iHRIS Qualify to quickly verify credentials. The council also uses the system to track information that is shared with the Ministry for workforce policy-making and planning.

“People can now identify the quacks”

The council recently made its information publicly available through a mobile directory. The Uganda Capacity Program and the council developed the directory by combining iHRIS data with mobile phone technology. The information is also available online.

Using the mobile directory, anyone can access information on 3,877 doctors and dentists by sending a text message to the council with “doctor” followed by a name. A message from the council will indicate if the provider is registered, licensed, and has a specialty. Similar information can be determined for more than 3,500 facilities.

“In the past we had been using a [paper] directory, a booklet,” recalls Dr. Katumba. The bulky directory was expensive to produce, difficult to transport, and could not be easily accessed by patients all over the country.

Now, Ugandans can use the mobile directory to seek health services from qualified health workers at qualified facilities. What’s more, notes Dr. Katumba, “people can now identify the quacks easily from our database, either on a mobile phone or the Internet.”

Dr. Katumba says the new mobile directory is contributing to more effective deployment of doctors and dentists. “You can use it for specialized recruitment, or headhunting,” he explains.

“We want to reach the villages”

The mobile directory is primarily being used in urban areas. “We want to reach the villages where much of these problems are, where quacks have compiled,” says Dr. Katumba. As a first step, the council plans to translate the directory into local languages.

“We are going to eliminate quacks,” affirms Dr. Katumba. “We shall do away with all these clinics where people calling themselves health workers have been causing injuries and death.”

Uganda’s other three professional health councils are using iHRIS Qualify as part of the national health workforce information system. The Ministry now has access to the total number of qualified health workers, their qualifications, and where they are deployed. The Uganda Capacity Program is creating mobile directories for each council.

Special thanks to Dr. Katumba, and to Randi Burlew and Dykki Settle for interviewing him. Watch a short [video](#) of Dr. Katumba, part of CapacityPlus’s “I’m a Health Worker” series.

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